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Mrs. Colonel Bridges

BY

MRS. FORRESTER,

AUTHOR OF "DIANA CAREW," "DOLORES," "FAIR WOMEN," "MY HERO," "FROM OLYMPUS TO HADES."

PHILADELPHIA:
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MIGNON.

CHAPTER I.

It is afternoon of the —th of June. Mrs. Stratheden is "at home."

But Mrs. Stratheden's "at homes" are very different from the general run of those vapid and dreary *entertainments* (heaven save the mark!) that are made nowadays to do duty for more genial and costly hospitality. *Men* go to them, yes, actually men; not decrepit old fellows nor unfledged youths, but men, —the sort of men you see in club windows, on four-in-hands, at St. Stephen's and elsewhere. The State, the Bar, the Army, are represented in her drawing-rooms, and, *very occasionally*, the Church. There is one pleasant-faced, cheery-mannered divine of most eloquent tongue and practical good sense, who thinks a half-hour now and then not at all ill spent at one of these réunions.

People do not come here as they do to most "at homes," thinking it an awful bore and resolving to get away again as soon as possible; and indeed who would not rather be rolling through the pleasant cheery streets in their carriage, than crushing toilettes and rubbing angry shoulders in a social bear-garden in the struggle to catch the hostess's eye—poor bewildered woman! that she may know they have not neglected to honor her reception. *Reception!* there is not one Englishwoman in five hundred who knows how to *receive*, far less to entertain. I should doubt if there are ten women in London who could invite fifty people to an "afternoon" and send them all away pleased and satisfied. I should be sorry to be asked to put my hand upon the nine; but Mrs. Stratheden would be the tenth, or rather, perhaps, the first. To

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begin with, she did not issue cards for a series of days, as the common practice is, but sent a separate invitation for every reception and had the happy knack of asking the right people to meet each other. Few houses could be better adapted for an "at home" than hers. It was *not* a hundred miles from May Fair, and it *was*, literally and truly, a "bijou residence," strikingly unlike what auctioneers love to designate by that taking title. A "bijou residence," being translated, usually means a poky, inconvenient little house, destitute of every comfort and convenience, and not improbably "giving" on a mews from the back windows. Agents would undoubtedly have called this a mansion. It had six *bonâ fide* reception-rooms,—dining-room, library, billiard-room, two drawing-rooms entirely separate, and a boudoir. There was therefore no difficulty in distributing the guests. Mrs. Stratheden received in one drawing-room; in the other there was always music. She did not depend upon her friends, but had professionals,—not eminent artists who sang their highly-paid song amidst a compulsory hush and rushed away again immediately, but singers who if not of a wide celebrity invariably gave pleasure and satisfaction. One was a young man who sang French songs charmingly and played the newest and most popular waltzes; the other was a girl with the sweetest voice imaginable who sang English ballads. Stray couples found their way to the boudoir, to admire the perfect taste of its arrangement, or to look at photographs, or——into each other's eyes. The billiard-room was very popular,—there were so many nooks and corners in it, and the click of the balls made low-toned conversations easy to the speakers and inaudible to would-be listeners. There were whist-tables in the library, if any one cared to play. In the dining-room, neat-handed Phillis and a coadjutor served tea, coffee, strawberries-and-cream and ices, and wine and liqueurs to the stronger sex. Their lady did not number many tea-drinking men among her acquaintance.

On this —th of June, then, Mrs. Stratheden is receiving. Let me show her to you as she stands, a slim hand outstretched, greeting with evident pleasure a man who has just entered. Look at her well: she has a considerable part to play in this story, and her history is a very strange one. Not a beautiful woman! no one would ever call her that, for her charm is

chiefly dependent upon expression. She is gracious, elegant, and has as much vivacity as is compatible with being "*grande dame jusqu'au bout des ongles.*" A face that would never simper from a "Keepsake" nor a "Book of Beauty," but might be engraved on more than one man's heart. How old? Old enough to know the world thoroughly,—to have gauged the depth of its woes, the shallows of its pleasures, the vanity of its aspirations, the falseness of its illusions. How young? Young enough to attract love and admiration; young enough for it to be possible that the best of her life is still lying in the future.

Many men have loved, many women hated her, and yet, strange to tell, no whisper of scandal has ever left its dulling breath upon the mirror of her fair fame. Few women live so free, so unrestrained a life, but no one suspects her of abusing her position: it is an enigma that has ceased to be one because the world has grown accustomed to it. Women assign as a reason her *coldness;* men say,—nay, I think they exercise the masculine virtue of reticence and say nothing. Mrs. Strath-eden is speaking: the *timbre* of her voice is delicious, low, soft, and clear.

"Sir Tristram! how glad I am to see you back!"

It is pleasant to return to one's country after a long absence; it is pleasant to be welcomed by a charming woman whose eyes are in harmony with her lips as she gives you a glad greeting. So thinks Sir Tristram.

"And I," he answers, "am delighted to see you again. How well you are looking! Not a day older, and as charming as ever!"

"You have not lost your civilized little habit of saying pleasant things in the wilds," she smiles. "I am dying to hear all about your travels. I tried very hard to persuade Mr. Conyngham to bring you to dine with me to-night, but men, some men" (glancing maliciously at the third member of the group), "are so selfish. He said he *must* have you to himself to-night."

"I admit the soft impeachment," laughs Mr. Conyngham. "I am a confirmed, inveterate bachelor, and that genius is proverbially selfish. If I could have given him up to any one, it would have been to you."

"When *will* you come and dine with me?" Mrs. Strath-

eden asks Sir Tristram. "I want you quite alone. Alone, you know, means Mrs. Forsyth and myself."

"Oh, any night," he answers. "I shall be only too delighted. To-morrow, though, I have to go into Surrey to see my new property. By the way, did you hear that my crotchety old uncle, whom I never saw, had left me his estate there?"

"I saw it in the 'Illustrated,' and was delighted. I congratulate you. Not" (smiling) "that you were much in need of it."

"I am afraid I was ungrateful enough to think it rather a bore when the news reached me," says Sir Tristram. "It is an additional responsibility, of course."

"Hand it over to me, my dear fellow," interrupts his friend. "I should not feel the *gêne* of that sort of responsibility in the least."

"I shall not be back until late to-morrow night," Sir Tristram continues, addressing Mrs. Stratheden.

"And I dine out to-morrow and Wednesday," she answers. "Shall it be Thursday?"

"Yes; on Thursday I shall be charmed."

"And you will tell me all about India, China, and Mexico?" laughs Mrs. Stratheden;

> 'Of moving accidents by flood and field,
> And of the cannibals that each other eat,
> The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
> Do grow beneath their shoulders.'

"In your three years of travel you must have seen almost as much as Othello."

"And you will be Desdemona?" says Sir Tristram, playfully.

"Fancy a dark, middle-aged Desdemona!" she laughs. "I saw such an one once at a country theatre, and it made me laugh inordinately. No! but I mean to find you a fair, young one; for it is not to be supposed that you will be allowed to remain a bachelor much longer."

"Thank heaven, it is not worth any one's while to insist on marrying me!" interposes Mr. Conyngham, with a wry face.

At this moment other guests are announced, and the two men make way for them.

"Come into the music-room," whispers Mr. Conyngham, and Sir Tristram follows him.

As they enter, a slight dark girl is singing an old English ballad very sweetly to a considerable and evidently appreciative audience. When it is finished, Sir Tristram finds himself the centre of a group of old friends and acquaintances, who greet him with evident pleasure. When at last Mr. Conyngham succeeds in carrying him off, he is booked for about a dozen entertainments of different kinds.

"What a thing it is to be rich and titled!" says his friend, with latent sarcasm.

"You old cynic!" replies Sir Tristram, gayly. "Is that why you are so fond of me?"

"I want to show you the boudoir,—the most perfect woman's-room I was ever in. We shall probably drop upon a stray couple of lovers; but they won't take any notice of us, if we don't of them."

He pushes open the door, and discloses two young people seated on a couch. The man looks up with a real English stare which says, plainly, "What the deuce do you mean by your impertinence in disturbing me?" but it gives way to quite a different expression when he recognizes the intruder.

"Sir Tristram! is it you? I did not know you were back. I'm awfully glad to see you."

"Raymond l'Estrange?" utters Sir Tristram, half in doubt. "Why, my dear boy, I should not have known you. You are big enough for a Life Guardsman!" And he shakes him warmly by the hand.

"What a handsome fellow!" he thinks to himself. "He was always a good-looking boy; but I never dreamed of his turning into this."

"Then of course you would not have known me," interrupts an arch voice, and the prettiest, most piquante, mignonne creature jumps up off the sofa and joins the group.

"Not Kitty—not Miss Fox!" ejaculates Sir Tristram.

"Yes. Kitty Fox."

"By Jove!" he cries, with a glance of mingled admiration and affection at the gold-framed cherub face upturned to him.

It only wants one glance to see that this is the most arch, mischievous, impertinent little sprite in the world.

"And last time I saw you," continues Sir Tristram, "I rescued you and yards of torn frock from an apple-tree, whilst your poor governess stood bathed in tears at the foot."

"Yes, by Jove, it's me!" she retorts, with glee; "and I'm out. I'm seventeen and three-quarters; I was presented this season, and I'm going to get married before it's over. *I* don't mean to remain a drug in the market, I can tell you."

"Pray," asked Sir Tristram, laughing, "is it any use my putting in a claim? But I suppose you think I'm old enough to be your grandfather?"

"Oh, no; I won't have you," she says, her eyes dancing with fun. "You are too nice; and I mean to bully my husband. It's so vulgar to be fond of each other nowadays. And I'm not going to marry Raymond, though you *did* find us in such suspicious proximity just now: he has the most awful temper, and we should lead a cat-and-dog life."

"How should I suit you, Miss Kitty?" inquires Mr. Conyngham.

"Very well indeed, as far as not caring for you goes," retorts the impertinent minx; "but you haven't enough money."

"Every misfortune has its consolations," he says, making her a little bow.

"You mean that to be 'sarcastical,'" she laughs. "Fortunately for me, I am very stupid, and don't understand your dark sayings."

"How's the colonel, Kitty?" interrupts Sir Tristram. "I suppose I must call you Miss Fox, though, now."

"Not worth while, as I don't mean to be Miss Fox much longer. Oh, papa's very well. Playing whist in the library, I think. He'll be delighted to see you (if he isn't in the middle of a rubber). Let's go and find him."

"How is your mother, Raymond?" asks Sir Tristram, as they descend the stairs. "Is she in town?"

"Yes, and about the same as usual. I hope you'll come and see her soon. She'll be so awfully glad to see you."

"To be sure I will. Give her my love, and say I'll call to-morrow; no, not to-morrow; the next day."

Ten minutes later Sir Tristram and Mr. Conyngham emerge from Mrs. Stratheden's house and wend their way Piccadillywards.

If you wanted to exhibit to a foreigner a perfect type of

an English gentleman, you would probably (had you known him) have selected Sir Tristram Bergholt for your specimen. No longer a young man, yet not too old to be pleasing to women, frank-mannered but lacking nothing of dignity, courteous, well bred, utterly devoid of slanginess (the fashion and the taint of the age), refined without affectation, genial, generous, kind-hearted. Proud, perhaps, but only proud in the right way,—proud of sustaining the honor of his house, too proud to be guilty of a meanness, proud in resenting impertinent familiarity; not proud, as is the fashion nowadays, of the bare possession of a title and wealth and using them, as is too often the case, to procure unworthy indulgence or to cover mean or base actions.

Without being strictly handsome, he is particularly good-looking and has a thoroughly distinguished air. His six-and-forty years sit lightly on him: there are not a great many silver hairs among his brown locks, nor has Time as yet traced a very elaborate pattern about his brow or mouth; his handsome gray eyes are full of brightness and vivacity; his teeth are strong and white. A man "in the prime of life," most people would have said.

Fred Conyngham, the one great friend of his life, is rather younger, but looks years older. He has a plain, shrewd face, and looks what he is, a thorough man of the world. A sceptic, with a vein of cynicism, a strong sense of humor, as much selfishness as goes to the making of a man of the world, a caustic wit, and really and truly, though he is very much ashamed of and would not admit it, a kind heart. He loves Sir Tristram nearly as well as himself, and better than any other living human being.

"What a wonderful woman that is!" says Sir Tristram. "What a charming house! what perfect taste she has!"

"Perfect," assents his friend. "You have not seen it before? No! she took it just after you went abroad. It was a very different-looking place then, but she got a long lease and has almost rebuilt it."

"And yet," says Sir Tristram, thoughtfully, "she does not look a happy woman. I wish she would marry some nice fellow."

"Pshaw! she has everything she wants, and is sensible enough not to give any one the chance of making her misera-

ble. She married once to some purpose, and now, like a wise woman, is content to rest upon her laurels."

"Nonsense, Fred! you can't call going through a ceremony with a fellow on his death-bed, marrying."

"Can't you? by Jove! Anyhow, the ceremony you speak of with such contempt converted her from a penniless girl into a charming widow with any quantity of thousands a year. The odd part of it is, she has all the *aplomb* and dignity of a married woman. It always takes an effort of memory on my part to remember her real story."

"Poor Olga!" ejaculates Sir Tristram: "she might have made some fellow very happy."

"And as it is," retorts his friend, "she extends her beneficence to a hundred. Her cook and cellar are perfect, and a good many men would like to hang their hats up at No. 1000."

"Do you think there are not lots of fellows who would marry Olga Stratheden without a penny?" cries Sir Tristram, warmly.

"Can't say," returns Fred Conyngham, with a cynical twist of his mouth. "Fortunately for her, they haven't been put to the test. I think the tender passion is greatly augmented in our selfish breasts when the fair object of it has as many adventitious adjuncts as Mrs. Stratheden."

"Fred, I'm ashamed of you! You don't believe in anything, you old reprobate!"

"Yes, I do. I believe in my appetite and my digestion. When either of those fail me, faith will be a word of empty sound in my ears."

"Where do we dine?—Boodle's, or the Wyndham?"

"Neither. I have a little surprise for you. I am sick of clubs, especially this time of year. We are going to dine at *home*. Here we are!"

CHAPTER II.

"I follow a more easy and, in my opinion, a wiser course, namely, to inveigh against the levity of the female sex, their fickleness, their double dealing, their rotten promises, their broken faith; and, finally, their want of judgment in bestowing their affections. These, gentlemen, are my reasons for the discourse you heard me address to my goat, whom (because she is a female) I despise, although she be the best of the fold." CERVANTES.

MR. CONYNGHAM takes out his latch-key and opens the door of a pleasant-looking house in Piccadilly, facing the Green Park. He precedes his friend up two flights of stairs and throws open the door of a large, airy room.

"This is a great improvement upon your last quarters," remarks Sir Tristram, as he enters.

"Yes. I begin to feel the want of a home now. Club life is dull and lonely after a certain time: one's contemporaries get married or die.

'Marriage and death and division
Make barren our lives.'

I get a better dinner at home, and don't have to wait for it, and I like to sit at my window afterwards and smoke. I've got used to the noise, and the look-out over the Park is charming."

The room is a thorough man's room. By that I do not mean a young man's room such as has been described by the novelist *ad nauseam*,—an assemblage of foils, whips, guns, boxing-gloves, cigar-chests, etc., etc., mixed up with pictures of favorite racers and sirens more or less lightly clad; but I mean the room of a man who has outgrown the swagger and affectations of boyhood and settled down into a steady-going, respectable member of society. Fred Conyngham's room is the perfection of neatness and comfort; everything is handsome, solid, and useful; there is nothing "gim-crack" throughout its length and breadth. The only indication that its owner is a votary of "*le sport*" is the neat mahogany gun-case fastened

to the wall, through the glass windows of which you may behold two pairs of workmanlike-looking breech-loaders and a duck-gun. A large, well-filled book-case occupies two-thirds of one wall, a writing-table that holds everything a writer could possibly want stands near the window, an inviting sofa and various easy-chairs court repose, there are stands for newspapers and magazines, a handsome mahogany what-not and one or two cupboards happily combining the useful with the ornamental. Of *bonâ fide* ornament there is very little: a magnificent clock and pair of bronzes on the mantel-piece, some genuine old brass dogs on the hearth, a few bright, charming pictures on the wall, of whose value the names on the frame are sufficient guarantee, and the catalogue of ornament is finished.

The table is laid for dinner. Every appointment—damask, plate, glass—is perfect. In the centre stands a bowl of roses which do not in the least look as though they had come from the green-grocer's, as indeed they have not. Truth to tell, they were plucked only this morning by a fair maid's fingers in a garden not twenty miles from London, where green willows dip their feathery branches into the Thames and past whose bank proud graceful swans sail. Fred has friends among that sex which he loves to revile.

"I see you have become a confirmed old bachelor since I left England," says Sir Tristram, as they return from an inspection of the rest of Mr. Conyngham's "*appartement.*"

"Confirmed," replies the other. "As I told Mrs. Strathcden, thank heaven it is not worth any one's while to insist on marrying me."

"And yet," says Sir Tristram, reflectively, "I am not sure if one had a nice wife——"

"If!" retorts Fred: "that is about the biggest *if* you can well pitch upon. Well, I suppose *you* will have to come to it sooner or later; but give *me* my dinner of herbs with peace,—or, better still, a stalled ox with peace. I don't know why the two should be incompatible. Come! here's our stalled ox, or a bit of him, in the soup-tureen. I don't know how you feel, but I don't eat lunch and am quite ready for my dinner. Here's the menu. I won't answer for the spelling; but indifferent English is better than bad French, in my opinion."

The dinner is of the choicest, everything is cooked to perfection, the champagne iced to a turn, and Mr. Conyngham's servant is as quick and noiseless as a slave in an Eastern tale.

The great event of the day is over, and the two friends are placidly smoking their cigars by the open window. Sir Tristram is complimenting Fred upon his cook.

"Quite a *cordon bleu*," he says, with a smile.

"Not so bad," Fred answers, a conscious smile widening his mobile lips.

"Not so bad! By Jove! I'll answer that no two men in London have dined better than you and I to-night. Where did you pick her up?"

"D'Aubray sent her me from Paris."

"A Frenchwoman!"

"No, but she learned her art there."

The days are at their longest: it is not yet dark: the rattle of omnibuses and cabs has subsided; conversation is no longer an effort. Nevertheless the pauses are frequent and of considerable duration, as is the case with men who are intimate enough to follow their inclination without feeling the necessity of playing at company. It is not because they have nothing to say, but, on the contrary, so much, that it is difficult to begin. This difficulty is not uncommon with friends who have not met for a long time.

"Tristram," says Mr. Conyngham, after an interval of silence, following aloud a thought that has been occupying him, "I'm afraid your doom is sealed."

Sir Tristram rouses himself with a little start: he too has evidently been away on a mental journey.

"Doom!" he echoes. "What are you talking about, Fred?"

"I have observed an undercurrent of it pervading your letters for some time," pursues Mr. Conyngham, "and I have been preparing myself to meet it. You have been thinking seriously lately of marrying. You can't deny it! Pshaw!" (as Sir Tristram hesitates) "I know all about it,—old property, no direct successor, future generations unborn, etc., etc. My dear fellow, you've led a very comfortable easy-going life for forty-six years; take my advice and spend the twenty-four remaining ones in peace, as I intend to do."

"Every one to his taste," answers Sir Tristram, gayly. "If you can look forward to a lonely old age with equanimity and

find books your pleasantest companions and your dinner the only consideration of importance, I won't attempt to convert you; but I confess, for my own part, I feel the want of something more. The companionship and sympathy of a bright young creature——"

"Good heavens!" interrupts Fred, regarding him with serio-comic horror; "*young* did you say?"

"You don't suppose," retorts Sir Tristram, the color deepening in his bronzed cheek,—"you don't suppose I am going to marry an old one! My own age, for instance?"

"There are degrees. You wouldn't surely be fool enough to marry a girl of seventeen or eighteen. Why, when you are an old fellow of sixty, she will be one-and-thirty, just in her prime. Now, my dear old boy, vanity never was your weak point, and you always had a very fair share of common sense: do you suppose that a handsome young woman (of course you intend her to be handsome) is likely to be satisfied with the battered remains of what has been a fine man?"

"Hang it, Fred," cries Sir Tristram, laughing, though not particularly pleased, "I have not come to battered remains yet, I hope. However, it is rather premature to discuss the subject. I have not been in England a week; and I certainly have not seen any one, so far, whom I feel inclined to ask to be Lady Bergholt."

"Hark ye, Tristram," says his friend; "I want to have a little serious conversation with you. Your feelings are not engaged so far, therefore my task won't be quite so hard. Although you are a man of the world and have seen a good deal of life, you were always rather an ingenuous and unsuspicious youth, added to which you have been out of your own country for three years, and you have not the least idea how the honorable estate of matrimony has deteriorated and been degraded in that time. Marriage is the curse of nine-tenths of men nowadays. In the good old time, when women were keepers at home, when they sewed and spun with their maids, prepared conserves and confectionery, physicked the poor, and 'made their own souls,' it may have been a bearable institution,—though I expect female tongues were as shrill and female tempers had as many angles as now; but to-day, when women only take a husband as an irksome appendage to freedom, to unbounded extravagance and unbridled license of

behavior, heaven help the poor fool who runs his head into *that* noose! Look around you, Tristram, before you take a step from which there is no return but through a shameful gate, and, when you see a poor wretch writhing under the fetters he has manacled himself with, say, 'There, but for my friend Fred, goes Tristram Bergholt.' Women are not what they were, though for the matter of that nothing is. Don't talk to me about the doctrine of perfectibility!—as far as I can see, everything is going to the dogs as fast as it can. Look at the army! I'm not a soldier, but I know deuced well what these new systems and pretended economies are bringing it to. If the British tax-payer doesn't have to put his hand into his pocket twice over to make up for it, I shall be very much astonished. I saw a batch of recruits the other day. Pah! it made me positively ill:—no chests, no legs, no stamina, no height, no anything there ought to have been. Navy not much better. As to the lower classes, heaven help us! what with school-board education, what with cheap papers, with unprincipled ruffians persuading them that they are equal to their masters and better, what with strikes, high wages, emigration, etc., by Jove! we shan't have any lower orders soon. Oh for the good old Tory days, when betwixt class and class there was a great gulf fixed, when a servant looked up to his master and 'the maiden to the hand of her mistress,' when every family had its faithful old servants, a thing that, mark my words, won't exist in the next generation, Tristram."

"I am afraid they are dying out," he assents.

"When you go into a shop now," continues Fred, "you are served by 'young ladies' and 'gentlemen.' I don't so much mind an elegant young female, be-flounced and be-panniered, tripping up to one with a condescending smile; but when a wretch of my own sex minces up to me in a frock-coat and a crimson tie, with his perfumed handkerchief and perhaps a flower in his button-hole, a Cain-like feeling comes over me, and I thirst for his blood."

Sir Tristram laughs.

"The garrulity of age is creeping over you, Fred," he says. "You began with matrimony, and you have wandered off, heaven knows where."

"I'll go back," returns Fred, promptly. "We have all the night before us, and I feel as though the mantle of Juvenal

had fallen upon me and I could go on for hours lashing the vices of the age. Back to the women! Don't you remember when we were young men, Tristram, how different society was? A fast married woman was a very rare thing: you hardly ever saw one dance a round dance. Indeed, young fellows never thought of inviting them, except as a sort of civility in return for hospitality. The young matrons used to sit and look on with kind sympathy and interest at the girls: they had had their day. Now, if you please, the girls are the wallflowers and the married women their bitterest and most implacable rivals. Why, the other night the Reds gave a ball and there were only two unmarried women asked. What business have women who have husbands of their own, I should like to know, with other men's arms around their waists, other men's breath in their faces, with their flirtings and whisperings, their oglings and meetings! Then their extravagance! Why, our mothers thought a good deal of a couple of new silk gowns a year, and had perhaps a velvet and a moiré antique as standing dishes, but now the number of dresses that a woman of moderate income thinks it necessary to have is enough to make your hair stand on end. You know Charlie D——. He has about two thousand a year, which he augments now and then by a little judicious horse-dealing, and his wife had four new dresses for Ascot last week, besides evening toilettes and a gorgeous dressing-gown for the smoking-room. Begad! one can hardly wonder at the women, when the men make such asses and mountebanks of themselves. Brocade coats and trousers lined with pink or blue quilted satin to smoke in, and their monograms in gold on their slippers. Bah!" And Fred's countenance is a sight to see. "Well! little Mrs. D—— informed me with great glee about her four marvellous toilettes, and kindly offered me a sight of them, but, as I declined, she insisted on describing them. Three came from Paris, and the fourth from the most extravagant woman in London."

"I wonder how poor Charlie will look when he gets the bill," remarks Sir Tristram.

"H'm!" says Fred, following the thin stream of smoke that is making its way from his lips to the window, "these are odd times, when a man may think himself fortunate *if he is asked* to pay his wife's bills. It seems to me the only

reputation women want to have (a good many of them), is a bad one."

"Fred," cries Sir Tristram, "I am not going to be demoralized!—if you are a cynical old misogamist, you shall not pervert me into one. I confess it, I want to marry; and, as you keep kindly reminding me I have not much time to lose, I shall take the earliest opportunity of presenting my wife to you (after I have found her). Marriage is a lottery; we all know that trite old saying by heart. I believe it's the happiest state in the world if things work reasonably well. Why, what the deuce! I'm not an ogre; I feel as full of life and health as I ever did. I can give my wife most things that satisfy a woman moderately easy to please: why should I not make her happy, and she me?"

"Ah," returns Conyngham, "I too have my ideas of how marriage could and should be the happiest state in the world; but they would be laughed to scorn nowadays as old-fashioned, exploded, impossible."

"I should like to hear them," says Sir Tristram.

"To begin with, I would not marry a woman under the age of three- or four-and-twenty (I mean if I were ten or fifteen years younger than I am). At that age she ought to have attained as much perfection physically and mentally as she is capable of. Only conceive to yourself the mischief—moral, social, physical—of making a little romp of seventeen like Kitty Fox the head of your house, the keeper of your honor, the mother of your children! And yet she was perfectly serious this afternoon when she told you that she meant to marry before the season was over. Marriage means to her and the girls of her set, not an awful responsibility, not the sealing of her doom for life and for eternity (if there is one), but the means of throwing off all restraint, of being unlimitedly *fast*, of eclipsing her friends by the splendor of her dress and the number of her lovers."

"Come, come, Fred, you are exaggerating! For my own part, I do not see why a woman should not be well dressed and admired after her marriage as well as before. Why, you confounded old Turk, I believe you would like to shut them all up and only let them go about veiled."

"No, certainly not. The only veil I would have should be their own sense of modesty and propriety."

"I should like my wife to be charming and to entertain my friends," says Sir Tristram.

"So should I; but there are different ways of charming and entertaining. You don't want her to entertain them by flirting with them and letting them make open love to her behind your back! Good heavens! the state of society is such now that they would probably do it before your face. You don't want her to turn every acquaintance into an object of distrust and suspicion, and your bosom friend into the man you may some day shoot, or want to."

"Stuff and humbug!" says Sir Tristram. "You are afflicted with a moral jaundice, Fred. Now go back from women *as you say they are* to your ideal woman."

"I came too late into a world too old,"

quotes Conyngham, with a grim laugh. "I doubt if I could find her now. Well, the ideal woman is to be on the right side of five-and-twenty. By that time she ought to be old enough to know her own mind, to have fixed her wandering fancy, and to be sure what sort of man is likely to make her happy."

"But suppose she cannot get him!"

"Don't interrupt! Once married, if she is as lovely as Venus, she will not care for nor accept, far less try to win, the admiration of any man but her husband. She will rule his house with prudence and discretion, bring up his children to be good and useful members of society, she will be religious without being bigoted (if such a thing is possible for a woman)."

"Why, Fred, you old sceptic! I thought——"

"An irreligious woman is a monstrosity. All women are superstitious; and therefore it is as well they should believe in something that *can* do them and society no harm, but may, on the contrary, do a great deal of good."

"Well?"

"Well, if she is not frivolous,—which the ideal woman would of course not be,—she will have plenty of time, without neglecting her children and household, to cultivate her mind and to make herself a pleasant, intelligent companion for her husband and capable of charming and entertaining his friends as you would have her do."

"The ideal woman is a prig," says Sir Tristram, rising, with a laugh, "and you are very welcome to her, for my part. Of the two, I would rather have little Kitty Fox."

"Ephraim is joined to his idols: let him alone!" ejaculates Fred. "Well, I would have warned you, but you would not let me. Don't come puling to me when it's too late. Now, then, tell me something about your travels."

CHAPTER III.

"Her face more fair,
Than sudden-singing April in soft lands:
* * * * * *
There is no touch of sun or fallen rain
That ever fell on a more gracious thing."
SWINBURNE.

SIR TRISTRAM is on his way to visit his new possession. He has been detained by business all the morning, and the afternoon is considerably advanced before he arrives at The Warren. He has elected to come incognito and without giving notice to the housekeeper in charge. So he leaves the fly that has brought him to the station at the tumble-down village inn, and does the rest of the thousand yards to the lodge-gates on foot.

It is a bright, hot day, but delicious airs come floating across the common, airs straight from heaven, airs that have never been filtered through other human lungs but come to him pure and virginal, perfumed with the faint wax-like odors of gorse and the aromatic scent of the firs. On his left is the long belt of trees that skirts *his* park, and before him a great expanse of common, dotted here and there with clumps of firs. Wave upon wave of golden-yellow gorse and broom floats before his eyes, mingled with the pink of budding heather. Sir Tristram looks at the scene with a feeling of complacency: he is no longer bored by the sense of the "additional responsibility."

"What a delicious air!" he says, taking off his hat and

letting the breeze play softly over the dark close-shorn locks that as yet time has not thinned. "A charming view! only wants one thing,—water. No scene can be perfect without that!"

The lodge which stands at the entrance-gate looks dreary and deserted: it is evidently untenanted. He opens the gate and admits himself. The drive is sadly neglected and grass-grown; the trees and evergreens that skirt the path on either side are rankly luxuriant and need to be pruned with no sparing hand. A fine cock pheasant runs across the road in front of him, and he counts a dozen little white scuts bobbing up and down among the bracken. "By Jove! that looks well!" he thinks, with the keen pleasure of a genuine sportsman. Presently he arrives at a spot where two ways meet, and pauses for a moment in uncertainty. A ringing laugh falls upon his ear, the laugh of a sweet full young voice: it is joined in and swiftly drowned by two louder ones.

"There is some one of whom I can ask my way," he thinks, proceeding in the direction of the voices. In another moment he comes upon a group which the thick branches of the evergreens have till now hidden from his sight. He stands mute before one of the most charming pictures in the world. A young girl is sitting on the topmost rail of a five-barred gate. Her hat has fallen off, and her golden hair is all smitten through with the broad sunbeams that glint between the sparsely-covered branches of an ancient oak. One long curl has escaped, and falls far below her waist. She is the loveliest creature, thinks Sir Tristram, who has visited many lands, that his eyes have ever yet fallen upon. At her feet is a good-looking boy of some eighteen or nineteen, on one knee, an arm aloft holding a cabbage-leaf full of big strawberries. Another boy, strikingly like the girl, leans laughing against the tree's trunk. "Accept, O Queen—" begins the kneeling youth, but at this moment they all simultaneously catch sight of Sir Tristram's smiling face.

The youthful gallant springs to his feet, red as the strawberries which he in his confusion scatters among the long grass; but the girl sits quite still, only a fair faint blush deepens in her lovely face.

"I beg you ten thousand pardons," says Sir Tristram, taking off his hat and addressing her, "will you kindly tell me

the way to the house?—there are two roads, and I am uncertain which to take."

"That leads to the house," she answers, pointing to the road on the right: "this goes to the garden and stable."

Her voice is perfectly self-possessed; there is neither *mauvaise honte* nor boldness in it, nor does she seem to feel any unpleasant consciousness of the position in which she has been discovered.

His question answered, what is there for Sir Tristram to do but to thank her and go? And yet he would fain stay. But, finding no excuse, he takes one more look at her lovely face, and goes.

"Entre or et roux
Dieu fit ses longs cheveux,"

he murmurs, as he wends his way up the avenue, and ever afterwards when he thinks of her those two lines flit through his brain. Ere long he comes upon an old-fashioned house, built in gothic style and overgrown by rank luxuriant creepers. It looks as deserted as a haunted castle in a fairy-tale. The front door is ajar, and he enters without ringing. He finds himself in a good-sized hall, furnished like a room, with heavy lumbering old furniture, and carpeted with a threadbare Turkey carpet. Cases of stuffed birds line most of the walls and surround the ponderous hat-stand that is now bare and deprived of the purpose of its existence. He opens a door and enters the drawing-room, a melancholy specimen of the taste of fifty years ago. The curtains are of dingy gray, striped with faded green; the carpet of dull drab is ornamented with huge bunches of impossible flowers; a heavy rosewood table stands in the centre of the room, and on it are a glass-shaded basket of uninviting wax fruit and a few dull books; the small oblong mirror that graces the chimney-piece is protected by yellow muslin; an ancient and high-backed piano stands in one corner. All the furniture is solid, ugly, unshapely. Sir Tristram walks to the window and looks out on the deserted garden. He sees in a moment its capabilities for being made charming; he notes where a glade may be cut through yon tangle of trees, giving a lovely peep at the distant common; in his mind's eye, carpenters, upholsterers, gardeners are already at work making the gloomy old place into a paradise. He turns, and crosses the hall to the room opposite. It is, as he con-

jectures, the dining-room. If possible, it looks more desolate than its *vis-à-vis*. A faded carpet, morcen curtains that have once been red, huge hideous mahogany furniture covered with worn-out leather, some dingy old portraits, and a dark lookout on a sea of evergreens that are running rampant and unpruned at their own sweet will.

"We will make a clean sweep of all these," says their new lord to himself, "and let in the light and air. Faugh! it smells like a vault! My poor old uncle must have had strange tastes."

He remarks, however, with satisfaction, that everything is scrupulously clean and neat.

A door opens from the dining-room into another room; he turns the handle, and finds himself face to face with a fine, gentlemanlike-looking man. The latter grasps the situation at once.

"Sir Tristram Bergholt, I presume?" he says. "I fear I must seem in the light of an intruder, but Mr. Tristram always allowed me the range of the library, and——"

"It is I who am the intruder," returns Sir Tristram, in his pleasant courteous manner. "I dislike fuss and preparation, and thought it would be pleasanter to run down quietly and take my first look."

"Poor Mrs. Bence will be in a great state of mind at not being allowed to welcome you with due state and ceremony," says the stranger. "She is an excellent creature: in fact, she lived some years in my family, and it was I who recommended her to Mr. Tristram. I must introduce myself" (smiling), "as there is no one else to perform the ceremony. My name is Carlyle—Captain Carlyle. I live opposite to you in a little cottage on the common: you must have passed it on your way here."

Sir Tristram remembers to have seen a low long house with gabled roof and a pretty garden full of roses and flower-beds. He likes the look of his neighbor, and thinks he detects a striking resemblance to Miss Goldenlocks on the gate. Captain Carlyle has had the same colored hair, though it is liberally sprinkled with silver now, but his face is fresh-colored, his moustache chestnut: in spite of his gray hair he does not look a day older than Sir Tristram himself.

"What a pity the place should have been so neglected!"

remarks the latter. "My uncle, I believe, was eccentric. I never saw him."

"Rather more than eccentric," answers Captain Carlyle, smiling. "For five years before his death he never allowed a stick of wood to be cut nor a gun to be fired on the place. It was a great loss to me: I used to shoot his game for him before that time."

"I hope we shall reap the benefit of his eccentricity," says Sir Tristram.

He has taken a fancy to Captain Carlyle, and feels as if he had known him for years. Captain Carlyle receives the same impression of the new master of The Warren.

"I had a difficulty in finding my way to the house," says Sir Tristram. "I was obliged to ask the road of a young lady." This is a cunning device to get information about Miss Goldenlocks.

"Oh! Mignon, I suppose: my youngest daughter. She came up with me to-day. Young puss! I fear she has made sad havoc among your strawberry-beds, she and her brother between them."

"I hope they have: they are most heartily welcome."

"Thanks. Are you going back to town to-night?"

"Yes, by the 9.30 train."

"After you have looked round, will you come and take pot-luck with us? There is no decent inn nearer than four miles; and I fear Mrs. Bence will not be prepared to entertain you."

Captain Carlyle gives the invitation with the frank inconsiderateness of a man, utterly unmindful of the probable condition of the larder at home.

Sir Tristram accepts the invitation as frankly as it is given. "*Entre or et roux*,"—the two haunting lines come back to him: he has a curiosity to see that golden head again.

"I am going home now," says Captain Carlyle. "Do you think you will have finished your business here in an hour?"

"Thanks, yes. I am only going to take a very cursory view to-day."

"Then I will return at six to show you the way."

Captain Carlyle leaves the house in a very pleasant, self-congratulatory frame of mind.

"Charming fellow; tremendous acquisition. I hope he

will be here a good deal. Evidently a sportsman. Glad I happened to be there and thought of asking him to dinner. By Jove! I wonder if there *is* anything for dinner, by the way."

This *arrière-pensée* makes the current of his thoughts a shade less pleasant. At this moment he comes in sight of the group whom Sir Tristram had surprised some half an hour earlier. The tableau has undergone a change now: all three are seated on the grass under the old tree; the scattered strawberries have been recovered and demolished; nothing remains but the discarded cabbage-leaf.

"Well, I suppose you know the news," he remarks, gayly, as he comes up to them. "Sir Tristram Bergholt has arrived."

"I said that was him," cries Mignon.

"Heedless of grammar they all cried, 'That's him.'"

spouts her twin brother, quoting from "Ingoldsby."

"And what do you think of him?" asks their father.

"Awfully good sort, I should say," replies Gerry Carlyle. "Didn't look at all like warning us off the premises, although he did catch us *in flagrante delicto* with his best strawberries."

"Horrid old wretch! I wish he had not come," pouts Mignon. "We shall never be able to come here with any comfort now."

"Mignon!" exclaimed her father, sharply. "You have not a very ladylike way of expressing yourself, and nothing could be less appropriate than your adjectives. He is the most charming, gentlemanlike fellow I have met for an age; and as for being old, I do not believe he is a day more than forty."

"Forty!" echoes Mignon, derisively, looking at her father from the depths of her dark-blue eyes. "What a juvenile! Forty! Why, that is almost as old as you, papa!"

And Mignon throws herself back and laughs *à gorge déployée*. As a rule, it is not becoming, even to a pretty woman, to laugh heartily and unrestrainedly; but to see Mignon laugh was the most charming thing in the world. It made you rack your brain to say something droll enough to set her off again the moment she stopped. Her lovely mouth uncurled as wide as it could,—which was not very wide,—you could count all her lovely pearls of teeth, and the sound of her mirth was like water rippling over little stones. Even her father could not

but forgive her irreverence, seeing how lovely she looked as she was guilty of it. As for poor Oswald Carey, the other member of the group, he has looked his heart away long ago. Mignon has been sole empress over that organ ever since he was twelve years old; and right royally she uses the prerogative of her fairness in lording it over him and every one else who is under its sway.

"He is coming to dine with us," says Captain Carlyle. "Gerry, run home, there's a good fellow, and tell your mother."

"Oh, papa, you are joking!" cries Mignon, looking up amazed. "You know it is Tuesday; and there is never anything for dinner on Tuesday."

"Nonsense! what do you mean?" cries her father, coloring a little.

"I heard mamma say only at lunch that there was nothing in the house, and that you would have to put up with bacon and eggs to-night."

Captain Carlyle's rosy views take a gray hue: he thinks it more than probable that Mignon is speaking the truth. As usual with a man when a difficult problem of domestic economy has to be solved, he waxes irritable.

"I suppose they can contrive something," he says, sharply. "I don't know what's the use of a pack of girls, if they can't turn their hands to something useful."

Mignon is the only member of the family who does not stand in awe of her father.

"Well, papa," she retorts, "if we could all of us cook, we couldn't make the butcher invent a new animal or kill on any day but Tuesday. I don't see why you should make such a fuss over the man because he is a baronet. Why shouldn't bacon and eggs do for him as well as us?"

"Damn eggs and bacon!" cries her father, in an access of wrath.

"He might have had some of his own strawberries, if we hadn't eaten them all," proceeds Mignon, imperturbably. "I don't suppose you could find a dozen more if you hunted the beds all over, Oswald: could you?"

Oswald shakes his head. He is quite the *enfant de famille:* there are no secrets from him.

"I'll tell you what, sir," he says. "I'll go off to the butcher and bring *something* back at all events."

"Do, there's a good fellow!" cries Captain Carlyle, relieved. "You must be quick about it, though, for there's only an hour and a half to dinner."

So Oswald, accompanied by Gerald, goes off at full speed to the butcher's, and Captain Carlyle and Mignon wend their way homewards, the former's sense of triumph at having the new owner of The Warren as a guest sadly impaired.

Mrs. Carlyle and her two elder daughters are sitting together in the pretty little drawing-room when they enter.

Mrs. Carlyle is a faded-looking woman with some remains of beauty. Her eldest daughter, Mary, has a kind, placid, Madonna-like face; the second, Regina, is handsome, haughty, discontented-looking.

There is no time to be lost. Captain Carlyle does not waste his breath unnecessarily, and he is an autocrat at home. So he says, with outward peremptoriness though a misgiving heart,—

"I met Sir Tristram Bergholt up at The Warren just now, and he is coming to dine here at seven."

If a thunderbolt had fallen in their midst, dismay could scarcely be more vividly pictured upon the faces of the three ladies to whom this curt announcement is vouchsafed. Tears spring to poor Mrs. Carlyle's eyes. Much as she stands in awe of her husband, she cannot but feel a mild indignation against him for having placed her in this cruel dilemma.

"It is impossible!" she says. "There is not a thing in the house. You must make some excuse; you must, indeed."

"Excuse!" retorts the captain, irefully: "you talk like a child! Invite a man to dinner, forsooth, and put him off half an hour after!"

Here Mignon interposes.

"Oswald has gone to the butcher's, mamma. He said he would be sure to bring back *something*. I dare say he will be here directly with half a sheep on his back."

"Mutton killed this morning!" utters Mrs. Carlyle, in the accent of profound despair.

"Of course you must make the worst of everything," cries her husband. "Upon my soul, it's enough to make a man cut his throat to live in a house where you can't bring any one to dine without calling forth a waterspout!"

"Papa," says Mignon, who is of a practical turn of mind,

"I have heard that if a chicken is cooked as soon as it is killed it is quite tender."

"Bravo, Mignon!" cries her father. "You are about the only one who has a head on her shoulders. Go and tell James to kill one!"

"We had the last chicken on Sunday," interrupts Miss Carlyle: "there are only the Dorkings now, and they are all laying."

"One of the youngest must be killed," decides the captain, promptly. "We are to dine at seven."

"It is half-past five now," utters his wife, looking mournfully at the clock. "I only hope Oswald will bring a neck of mutton, that we may have a dish of cutlets; there is not time for a joint."

A quarter of an hour later, Oswald comes in, crimson and out of breath. He brings in triumph a basket out of which sticks the shank of a huge leg of mutton.

Tableau!

CHAPTER IV.

"Yea, and if men have gathered together gold and silver, or any other goodly thing, do they not love a woman which is comely in favor and beauty?

"And letting all these things go, do they not gape and even with open mouth fix their eyes fast on her?"

Book of Esdras.

MEANTIME, Sir Tristram, unconscious of the woe he has brought on an innocent and deserving family, is calmly continuing his inspection of The Warren. Mrs. Bence has been made aware of his arrival, and hurries to his presence in extreme trepidation. His kindly manner soon reassures her: her terror gives way to admiration of her new lord. "The handsomest, affablest gentleman, I think, I ever set eyes on," she describes him later to the niece who helps her keep house. "I says to myself at once, 'There's a husband for Miss Carlyle or Miss Regina, if they have the luck to get him.'"

"Captain Carlyle was a friend of my uncle's, I suppose?" Sir Tristram says, when he has succeeded in stemming the torrent of her apologies.

"Well, sir, so to speak, he was," she answers: "at least he was the only gentleman that ever come to the house of late days. But poor master wasn't one for friends. He seemed to turn against every one the last year, and used to sit and read and mutter to himself. He was quite an old gentleman, though,—in his seventy-sixth when he was taken. One time he used to like to see the young ladies and Master Gerry; indeed, he was quite fond of him and Miss Mignon up till about this time twelvemonth, and then he says to me, 'Let 'em come and rob the garden of every bit of fruit,—that's all they want,—but don't let 'em ever come near me. I don't want to see or to hear 'em.' Poor young things!" says Mrs. Bence, warmly, "it's only nat'ral they should like good things, like all young folk; but," she adds, ruefully, "if I'd have known you'd been coming, Sir Tristram, they shouldn't have been near the strawberry-beds this week past."

"I don't eat fruit," answers Sir Tristram; "and please remember that I wish them to come just the same as usual. I saw them as I came up. There were two youths: are both Captain Carlyle's sons?"

"Oh, no, Sir Tristram; he has only one, Master Gerry, and he's twin with Miss Mignon. I lived nurse there when they was born. The other was Mr. Carey,—Mr. Oswald Carey: he's just like Miss Mignon's shadow when he's at home."

Improbable as it may seem, it is nevertheless a fact that a faint feeling of chagrin flitted over Sir Tristram at Mrs. Bence's last words.

"Are they engaged?" he asks.

"No, no, sir. Why, Miss Mignon's not long turned of seventeen, and she doesn't care two peas for him, nor never will for nobody, I don't believe," exclaims the housekeeper, with an impressive plurality of negatives. "The captain had a sad disappointment about poor Master Gerry; but there! I'm letting my tongue run on and never thinking to ask you whether you'll please to take a bit o' something to eat; though, not knowing you was coming, there's not much to offer. There's plenty of old wine in the cellar, however, that

poor master was very choice over. Shall I go and get the key?"

Sir Tristram assents: the richest and least covetous man in the world cannot be other than gratified by the acquisition of a cellar of old wine. He makes an inspection, thinks it looks promising, and betakes himself to the grounds. "My nephew has done the gardening single-handed the last five years," Mrs. Bence tells him: "there used to be four up to then; but poor master got very near of late years, and eight wouldn't be too many to keep it up properly as a gentleman's place should be kept, Sir Tristram."

"Well," he says, pleasantly, "I hope you will see them here some day."

"I've lived here a many years," utters the worthy soul, a sudden dimness clouding her vision, "and I've got very fond of the place, but I suppose I must expect to have to make way for others now, sir."

"Not at all! not at all!" he answers, kindly. "We shall see how we get on. At all events, you need not trouble yourself with any thought of leaving for the next twelve months. By that time we shall see how we suit each other."

"I am sure you will suit me, sir," returns Mrs. Bence, heartily; and Sir Tristram nods and smiles at her, and goes off to the garden, where soon afterwards Captain Carlyle joins him. Poor man! the *debonnair*, jovial look has gone from his face: he forces himself to seem cheery and at ease, but the thought of the huge leg of mutton and the ungainly Dorking hangs over him like the sword of Damocles. He knows what is right—oh, miserable unprofitable knowledge, curse of those who cannot

> "'Not only know'
> But also practise what they know."

Fain would he charm his guest with an elegant, recherché little feast; and he must set before him a limb that only yesterday trotted across the heath and led its owner to "crop the flowery mead," and a bird that laid his egg for breakfast this morning and would have laid it for many a day to come had not his own imprudence sacrificed it to an untimely fate.

Sir Tristram, ignorant of the sad thoughts at work in his companion's breast, talks cheerfully away, and does not even

remark the alteration in Captain Carlyle's manner. The latter is conning over to himself what excuses he shall make for the untempting meal when it is placed on the table. He is poor and proud, but he has not the pride that would prompt him to confess his dilemma with a frank grace that would rob the situation of half its difficulty. When they arrive at the cottage, the drawing-room is untenanted. Mrs. Carlyle and Regina are dressing for the dreaded ordeal, Mary is assisting and directing in the kitchen, Oswald and Gerry are shelling peas and enjoying it as a capital joke; even Mignon is gathering roses for the dinner-table. Captain Carlyle leaves his guest with an apology whilst he goes to select the best wine from his moderately-furnished cellar. Sir Tristram looks out of the French windows, sees Mignon,

> "one arm aloft,
> Gowned in pure white that fitted to her shape,"

and an exquisite shape it is, looks and longs for a moment, then steps diffidently out and joins her. She sees him, and gives him an unembarrassed smile of welcome.

"Will you give me a rose?" he asks her.

She is a saucy minx, and in a moment she cuts a huge full-blown cabbage rose and presents it gravely to him. Then, looking up and meeting his half-perplexed, half-discomfited look, she laughs her rippling laugh and with it takes his soul captive.

"I should prefer a bud, if you will give me one," he says, smiling.

"What will you do with it?" she asks. "I don't like a man with a flower in his button-hole,—it looks like a shopman out on Sunday; and you cannot carry it about all the evening."

"I will take it home and treasure it," he answers, half in jest, half in earnest.

"And label it Mignon," she says, saucily. "By the way, perhaps you don't know that my name is Mignon?"

"Yes, I do."

"It is an odious name, is it not?—so silly, too; and nearly every one mispronounces it."

"It is a charming name," says Sir Tristram, bethinking him of a quotation,—

"The sweetest name that ever love
Waxed weary of."

If she had been a woman of fashion, he would have told her the lines: being a fresh young girl, and, as such, the incarnation of all innocence and purity to him, he would have thought it a folly, nay, more, an impertinence, to utter them aloud in her presence. Mignon trips from tree to tree, robbing each with ruthless hand of its fairest children: crimson, blush and golden, snow-white and rosy pink, are pressed together in the firm grasp of her small lithe fingers, and Sir Tristram follows, watching her every movement and drinking in her perfections in charmed silence. Nature was in a happy mood, he thinks, when she dowered this god-child with so lavish a hand. As she stands on tiptoe to reach a crimson blossom, Sir Tristram, instead of gallantly bringing his superior height to the rescue, is taking the opportunity to look at her feet.

There is a certain noble lord (with whom in this matter my ideas are perfectly *d'accord*) who refuses to pronounce a woman beautiful until he has seen her eat. Sir Tristram never gives his verdict upon one until he has seen her feet. The momentary glance afforded him satisfies his critical eye. Mignon's feet are encased, it is true, in shabby slippers, but they are small and well formed. And upwards to her shapely hands, her creamy throat, her dimpled mouth, the exquisite upper lip and dainty nose, the long-lashed eyes and white brow whence springs an aureole of ruddy golden hair, there is not one point the ravished beholder would wish more perfect. A strange desire seizes him to add to all that nature has done the graces of art. He is not a believer in "beauty unadorned:" he would like it to be his task to put dainty slippers on the little feet, rare stuffs and samites on the shapely form, to crown the golden locks with pearls and diamonds. All these thoughts, that take so long to write, flash through Sir Tristram's mind in an instant. Unknowing how rapt his thoughts are in her, or how flattering their nature, Mignon is thinking meanly of his powers of being entertaining.

"You won't mind my leaving you a moment, will you?" she says. "I want to take these into the house; they are for the dinner-table."

"You will not be long," he asks. "You are not going to dress for dinner, I hope, as I am in morning dress?"

"Dress for dinner?" she repeats. "Oh, no; I am not going to dine. I hate dining late."

"Not going to dine?" (in some dismay).

"No. Oswald and Gerry and I are going to have eggs and bacon in the school-room. We never dine with the old people; we have so much more fun by ourselves."

Mignon's naïveté is decidedly of a thorny character; she is in the habit of pricking her auditors even without being actuated by any evil intent.

"Confound Oswald! I suppose she looks upon me quite as an old fellow!" are the two distinct thoughts that flash simultaneously across the mind of her interlocutor.

"Why may I not have bacon and eggs in the school-room too?" he asks.

"You!" she echoes; and then, apparently struck by some intensely droll idea, she laughs one of her wonderful, bewitching laughs.

Sir Tristram forgets, in his exceeding admiration, to think whether she is laughing at him. He has not seen her laugh before: it seems to him the most charming, fascinating thing he has ever seen in a daughter of Eve.

Whether saucy Miss Mignon is conscious of this natural and involuntary grace, I am unable to state: at all events, she does not attempt to check her jubilance.

"I wonder what amused you so much," he says, his curiosity awakening as her laughter dies away.

"Nothing," she answers, smiling, "only papa was so disgusted with me for suggesting that you should dine off eggs and bacon, and you have actually proposed it yourself."

"Let me join your party, may I?" he entreats, quite seriously.

Sir Tristram thinks as much of his dinner (not more) as most men who have arrived at his time of life, and whom circumstances have permitted to be critical, if not fastidious, as to what they eat. We must conclude that by his preferring to dine off bacon and eggs in Mignon's society to having a *bonâ fide* dinner with her parents (remember, he is not in the secret of the family dilemma), that bewitching damsel must have made no slight impression upon him.

"Oh, that would never do, after papa and mamma have been making such preparations for you."

When the words have escaped her, a misgiving as to their discreetness seizes Mignon, and she takes refuge in flight.

"I will come back," she cries, as she trips lightly off to the house.

Whilst Sir Tristram is debating in his mind whether this is a *ruse* to get rid of him, she reappears.

"Would you like to see the pigs and the chickens?" she asks, and carries him off in the direction of the pig-stye. On their way to it they pass a gate that leads to the common.

"How delicious the air is here!" he says, pausing to lean upon it and drawing in the flower-scented breath of the north wind with epicurean enjoyment. "I should think the people about here never die, do they?"

"Oh, yes; they are rather given to it; the water and the drainage are bad."

Sir Tristram registers a mental vow to alter the sanitary conditions of his property. Mignon leans over the gate a little apart from him. The "wanton zephyrs" are kissing her sweet lips and ruffling the little stray locks about her brow and throat. The man who stands beside her is fast losing his head over her loveliness, despite his forty-six years, despite its being half an hour beyond the promised dinner-hour and his being exceedingly hungry.

"You will not let my coming here prevent your going to The Warren as usual, will you?" he says, presently.

"Thank you" (with a tinge of regret in her voice), "but of course it won't be the same."

"Why not?"

Mignon answers with characteristic frankness, "I mean I cannot go about anyhow, as I have been used to do: you might come upon me round a corner when I least expected you, like you did to-day."

"Suppose I did? It would not harm you, and it would give me pleasure."

Mignon laughs.

"Did it give you pleasure to come upon me 'red-handed,' as Gerry said, in the act of eating your best strawberries?"

"Are they good ones?"

"Pretty good: nothing wonderful," she answers, suspecting him of meanness in her heart. Perhaps if she tells him how good they are, he will not be so generous. But he is thinking

that he would like to send her a cartload of the biggest he can procure from Covent Garden.

"I wish," he ventures, diffidently, "you would let me bring you some really worth having when I come next."

Mignon acquits him.

"Oh, thank you," she says, "but——"

"Do not say 'but:' do you care for other fruit, apricots and peaches?"

"I like everything that is good," she laughs; and, truth to tell, Miss Mignon is not only *gourmet* but *gourmande.*

Meanwhile, grief and despair are raging inside the cottage. Captain Carlyle is stamping furiously about, girding bitterly at his meek and distressed partner: it has been pronounced impossible for the colossal joint to bear any approximation to eatableness before a quarter to eight; and at a quarter to nine, punctually, Sir Tristram must start in order to catch the last up train. The host is registering savage vows against hospitality; never, never, if he lives to be the age of Methuselah, will he give an impromptu invitation to dinner again! Poor Mrs. Carlyle, though she dare not say so, devoutly hopes he will keep the vow. The captain has stormed once or twice into the kitchen, where cook stands hot, flustered, and wrathful: kind Mary, the peacemaker, is striving to help and to pour oil on the troubled waters. Regina is locked in her room, to be out of the way of domestic disagreeables, as well as to arm herself for conquest. She is handsome, and dying to get away from home, and is in no humor to despise the godsend that chance seems to have thrown in her way. Little does she dream how her young sister's loveliness is making the master of The Warren impervious to the charms of the rest of her sex.

At last, at last, dinner is on the table, and Sir Tristram is brought to it by his host. He has gathered from Mignon's unintentional hints that Captain and Mrs. Carlyle have been at some pains to do him honor, and he is prepared with his innate good breeding and kindness of heart to make their efforts a success. But, with all his tact, he cannot help feeling disconcerted (not for his own sake) when the covers are removed. Before the captain steams the hinder limb of a colossal sheep; in front of poor Mrs. Carlyle is a bird which could remind one of nothing but that antediluvian biped the dodo.

Its ungainly limbs are thrust in various directions; in her haste, poor cook has forgotten to singe it, and long black hairs assert themselves through the gelatinous white sauce with which its bony framework is sparsely covered. Poor Captain Carlyle! the perspiration stands on his brow with anguish. Poor Mrs. Carlyle! she could thin the white sauce with her tears. Regina talks fast, to conceal her chagrin. Sir Tristram seconds her ably, and falls to with the greatest appearance of enjoyment when his mutton, the lesser evil of the two, is put before him. But, alas! he too is soon of those who can testify to the truth of the poet's saying,—

"How far apart are will and power!"

even his teeth, which are as useful as they are ornamental, rebel against the affront put upon them; they positively refuse to meet upon this sinewy fragment. He is not to be daunted: he swallows it whole, regardless of consequences. Mercifully, the peas are excellent. He bestows such praise upon them, and falls into such rapture over the delight of having one's own kitchen-garden, you might have thought he had never enjoyed a dinner so much in his life. He is so pleasant and cheery that he almost succeeds in restoring the *amour-propre* of his hosts. Virtue is its own reward: he wins golden opinions from them, than which there are few things he is more anxious for. Only one thing perturbs him. Where he sits he can see Mignon seated on the gate where he left her. Oswald Carey is her companion. He can hear now and again her ringing laugh which he is dying to *see*. Presently they come towards the house. A little later he hears peals of laughter proceeding from (he concludes) the school-room, and a savory smell of bacon makes him wish, for more reasons than one, that he could join the party. Captain Carlyle, as it steals across him, thinks he might have done better if he had not pooh-poohed his daughter's suggestion of bacon and eggs.

The second course arrives. Dear good Mary Carlyle, by severe study of the cookery-book, has succeeded in transforming five delicious new-laid eggs into the consistency and appearance of an old shoe. Happily, the last state of things is better than the first: there is an excellent cheese and a delicious salad; and on these the two men appease their hunger. Women never

have any appetite when things go wrong, if they are weighed upon by any sense of responsibility.

The fly is at the door; there is no time to spare. Captain and Mrs. Carlyle and Regina wish him a joyful good-by, how thankful to "speed the parting guest" none knows but the entertainer with whom everything has gone wrong. Sir Tristram is full of thanks and kind words, but his eyes are wandering in search of Mignon. She does not come to take leave of him; and he is bitterly chagrined. As the fly drives off, he gets a glimpse in at the school-room window, where there is a light. Oswald is apparently drawing, and Mignon leans familiarly over his shoulder. Sir Tristram unconsciously gives vent to a movement of impatience.

Two hours later he walks into Fred Conyngham's rooms, where he is expected. His friend greets him with the usual British salutation.

"Well?"

Sir Tristram returns the usual British answer.

"Well!"

"Is it well?" Fred interrogates.

"Very well indeed, I think. I never saw a place with greater capabilities of being made charming, on a small scale. Nicely situated, good house, very fair sport, I imagine, and within an hour and a half of London."

"Sounds well," says Mr. Conyngham. "Any neighbors?"

"Very few, I should think. I met one at the place. Very nice fellow indeed; asked me to dinner."

"What sort of dinner did he give you?"

Now, I should really like to know why, seeing that Fred Conyngham is his bosom friend, the man in whom he is in the habit of reposing all his confidences, even of the most trifling nature, Sir Tristram should utterly forbear all mention of the unhappy failure of the dinner. Even when asked so leading a question, he only replies,—

"Oh, not so good as yours last night. I could not expect that."

"What sort of aged man?"

"Oh, about my own age."

Somehow the words jar upon him.

"Any daughters?"

"Three, I believe; but only one dined."

"Good-looking?"

"Rather handsome. Dark."

"Then you haven't met your doom yet," chuckles Fred. "Have a cigar and something to drink. My mind is relieved."

CHAPTER V.

"Oh, purblind race of miserable men,
How many among us at this very hour
Do forge a life-long trouble for ourselves,
By taking true for false, or false for true!"

TENNYSON.

WHEN two young English people (I am happy to think they manage these things better abroad) agree to unite in a reckless disregard of consequences, and a selfish confidence in, or oblivion of, the future, by joining their hands, their wants, and their impecuniosity, the act is glorified by the name of a "love-match." They are applauded by all the young of their species, and looked upon with sympathetic interest by friends who are not likely to be called upon to assist them in the impending struggle to make (as some one has said) "what is not enough for one, enough for two," or more probably for half a dozen. Their distracted families alone look at the matter from a practical, common-sense point of view, and refuse to join in the hero-worship accorded by outsiders to the foolish young couple. It would be all very fine, they hint, sternly, if the æsthetic pair meant to live on air and love, or, better still, if the man were willing for his passion's sake to turn bread-winner in earnest, and his fair helpmate to cook, to wash, and to sew; but it only means that, having had their own way and becoming rather disgusted thereat, they come back to beg of their friends, who are obliged in the long run, however they may grumble, to do what they can for them.

Captain and Mrs. Carlyle's had been a love-match. He was a handsome subaltern in a marching regiment, she a pretty penniless girl, both well connected. They loved as no two human beings had ever loved before (of course). Come pov-

erty, come all the ills that flesh is heir to, but let them bear them together. They married. Three months later they were humbly confessing their folly and asking help. Mr. Carlyle's father bought him his company, Mrs. Carlyle's pinched the rest of his family to give her a hundred a year. The conditions on both sides were stern: nothing more was to be asked. Two daughters were born, and then it became necessary for the dashing captain to sell out and exile himself to a neighboring country, where provisions and education were less expensive than in his own. Life went pleasantly enough for some years in the little Anglo-foreign town among a coterie of English similarly circumstanced, when a new embarrassment befell them. This time it took the form of twins, Mignon and Gerald.

If at that juncture Captain Carlyle's mother had not found it convenient to shuffle off the mortal coil and in doing so to leave her younger son three hundred a year and a charming cottage, there is no knowing to what straits this virtuous but unfortunate family might have been reduced. Captain Carlyle and his family left the cheery little foreign watering-place, where amusements and provisions were cheap and plentiful, and came to lead a dull life at the cottage on the heath.

Mrs. Carlyle, who was still rather a pretty woman and had been considered somewhat of a belle in the little Brittany circle, had to forego society now and console herself as best she might with rose-growing, worsted-work, and looking after her children. She was a devoted mother, and wife too, for the matter of that, and only grumbled now and then. Her husband was much better off. He went to London at least once a week, had his club, his stroll in the park, his little dinners with friends, an occasional stall at the opera or theatre. As his wife said,—as all good self-denying wives say,—"Oh, *we* get on very well" ("we" meaning herself and her daughters); "but *a man must be amused, you know!*" Captain Carlyle followed this prescription to the best of his ability. Being a handsome, well-dressed, pleasant-mannered man, he got invited to country-houses, shooting-parties, a cruise now and then, or a week's hunting. A good many of his friends did not even know that he was married; he did not obtrude the fact, though he admitted it with perfect frankness when questioned, and indeed could talk very sweetly about his "darlings at home."

After his mother's death, he held out the olive-branch to his elder brother (their father had been dead some time), and it was accepted. Mr. Carlyle used to come frequently to the cottage, took an immense fancy to Gerald, and led the sanguine parents to hope that he would make him his heir. It was improbable he would ever marry: the estate was entailed, and Mr. Carlyle had what his brother-was pleased to call an entanglement; that is to say, there was already a reputed Mrs. Carlyle, but, though she bore his name, she did not live in his house, and he distinctly and repeatedly assured his brother that, greatly as he was attached to her, he had not the smallest intention of marrying her. He was devoted to Gerald, had him constantly to stay, sent him to school and afterwards to Eton, gave him a pony, taught him to shoot,—in fact, brought him up as befitted a rich man's heir. The January before this story opens, Mr. Carlyle went out one morning as usual with his gun, and, getting through a hedge, it went off and shot him dead on the spot. He left no will. Captain Carlyle naturally supposed himself the heir: his grief for his brother was tempered by the sudden and unexpected access of fortune. But now Mrs. Carlyle came forward, showed her "marriage-lines," and gave indisputable proof that she had been Mr. Carlyle's lawful wife all along, though he had succeeded in persuading her (no one knew exactly why) not to assert her claims. Worst of all, she had two children, the younger a boy who came into the property. The acrimony with which, in his disappointment, Captain Carlyle contested the widow's claims and the validity of her marriage, made her a bitter and lasting enemy: so poor Gerald, from being a young man of considerable importance with the happiest prospects, was now only the son of a poor man, having great ideas and no means of carrying them out. He had to leave Eton, the sorest blow of all, and had been at home ever since, waiting until some decision as to his future could be arrived at. A nice bright young fellow he is, of a happy disposition, and bears his disappointment bravely, being helped thereto by the united love and petting of the whole family, who idolize him.

As Captain Carlyle, having taken farewell of his guest, smokes his cigar up and down the great path in the kitchen-garden between two rows of gooseberry bushes, he finds much food for reflection. Their new neighbor is a decided acquisi-

tion: he seems pleased with the place, and may in all probability, if the fancy grows, spend a good deal of time here, even though he has a much larger place up in the North. Why should he not take a fancy to one of the girls? say Regina. Mary is too sedate, quite the cut of an old maid, Mignon too young. Regina is handsome, and agreeable when she chooses: no one is to know she has the devil's own temper, and she would probably keep it to herself until after she had secured him. Here is an opening for the fortunes of the family. He seems a thoroughly good sort of fellow, is rich and of an old family, no doubt he would get Gerry a commission or provide for him somehow, and perhaps, if he should prefer his Northern place, he, Captain Carlyle, would have free quarters at The Warren and as much shooting as he liked. In spite of the dodo and the tough mutton, he is in an excellent humor when he joins his family in the drawing-room.

A fortnight elapses. Sir Tristram has been down five times to The Warren, and his relations with the family at the cottage grow more pleasant and intimate on every occasion. As a matter of course, now, he always dines with the Carlyles; and, as he is expected and due notice given, the disaster of the first evening is not repeated. He never comes empty-handed: with his usual consideration, he is reluctant to tax the hospitality of his new acquaintances; and his offerings are made with characteristic delicacy. Sometimes it is a salmon caught by a friend in the Blackwater, sometimes half a sheep bred on his own moors, hams acquired in some exceptional way (every present has a history and an excuse), clear turtle from the City, wonderful cases from Fortnum and Mason's, a dozen of cabinet hock for the captain, and wine brought unsparingly from the cellars of The Warren under pretext of tasting it. To Mignon he brings strawberries such as she has never seen before, so big she cannot get one into her pretty mouth all at once though she tries, and apricots and peaches the price of which would have astonished the reckless young lady had she known it. Mignon divided them pretty fairly with Gerry and Oswald; and of course Sir Tristram was immensely gratified by seeing the latter make four mouthfuls of two costly peaches, and, not aware of his vicinity, pronounce him afterwards a "good old bloke."

Mignon nearly died of laughter; and Sir Tristram's serenity returned on the spot. Nothing in the world, he thought, could be so beautiful as her laugh.

There is no possibility of a doubt now in any one's mind as to who is the attraction at the cottage. No one could see Sir Tristram with Mignon for five minutes without being certain that he was desperately in love with her. The young lady herself is perfectly aware of it; and, though she thinks it rather a presumption in this elderly man to admire her so freely, she tolerates him on account of the nice things he brings her and the superior consideration his attentions cause her to receive from her family. But she will persist in thinking him old; the young are very tenacious about the boundary-line of youth and age. No matter that Sir Tristram looks as he is, in all the prime and vigor of manhood, no matter that his face has scarcely a wrinkle, that his hair is unthinned, unwhitened by the hand of Time, that his teeth are as sound as a schoolboy's, he is as old as her father; *ergo*, he is old, ridiculously long past the possible age of a lover. She insists on calling him "a nice old thing," despite the remonstrances of her family, and many a time galls him sorely by hints and allusions to his antiquity, which up to the present moment he has never felt ashamed of.

In this little time, she has twined and coiled herself round his heart so tightly that the unclasping of her would be almost more than he could bear, he thinks. He loves her passionately, tenderly, with the wide difference that lies beween the love of a boy and that of a man no longer young. The first elements in a young man's love are the strength of its passion and its selfishness: it may be capable of sacrifice, but at the root and core the love is for his own sake. How often has one heard of a very young man giving up a woman for her own good! An older man's love (I am speaking of the true love of a true man) has other elements in it. It may have all the intensity of passion of the boy's love, but it is capable of a greater tenderness: it is more thoughtful for the beloved object, more careful of its welfare, more anxious for its good, even though that good stands between it and him. Sir Tristram loves Mignon with the love that her exceeding fairness, her (to him) bewitching ways, call forth; and he loves her also with the protecting tenderness of the

full-grown man for the child. His one idea is how in the future, should he be so blest as to call her his, he can make her happiest and most benefit her and hers. He knows all the family affairs: Captain Carlyle has with unreserved frankness confided to him the difficulties and disappointments that have beset him; he even tells him what he has carefully kept from every one else,—that he is at this moment considerably embarrassed by an unfortunate speculation. Sir Tristram is rich and generous; nothing would please him better than to relieve Captain Carlyle from his pecuniary troubles and to provide for Gerald; but between two men in their position a free gift is as impossible to offer as to receive: there must be an equivalent. In the minds of both men, though unhinted at in the most remote manner, Mignon represents that equivalent. Sir Tristram is the very farthest remove from a vain man. True, he has been loved and courted by women, but personally, he feels, he has not enough to recommend him to a lovely young girl as a suitor. But he has all the consciousness that a man of his age and standing must have, of the power and worth of his adventitious circumstances. All he has to endow her with is not enough, he thinks (the beggar-maid's beauty made her worthy of King Cophetua's crown), but all the same Mignon is poor, dowerless, prospectless, and he can give her the rank and wealth that will enhance her beauty and enable her to know and enjoy the full value of it. He will be no niggard with her, no selfish jealous husband; all he has shall be hers ungrudged; his shall be the task of giving her everything that can contribute to her happiness and enjoyment; he will not even ask any return; he will trust her implicitly.

Captain Carlyle's views on the subject are extremely simple. If Mignon gets Sir Tristram, she will be a devilish lucky girl; he is rich, titled, generous, does not seem to have a fault of heart or temper: he will make an unexceptionable husband. That Mignon should regard the matter from a different point of view never enters his brain.

That young lady, however, has as much idea of any marrying or giving in marriage in the matter as of learning the dead languages. She regards Sir Tristram much as Cinderella might have regarded the beneficent old fairy godmother who turned her pumpkin into a chariot. The idea of marrying

him does not enter her brain: when it is put there, she treats it with profoundest contempt.

One day Oswald says to her, in an access of jealous rage,—

"I suppose you are already thinking what a fine thing it will be to be 'my lady' and to be decked out in diamonds."

Mignon is sitting on her favorite gate, digging her pretty little teeth into a green apple in default of anything more inviting.

"What do you mean?" she asks, coolly.

"I suppose you will soon be Lady Bergholt," he answers, with a scowl, viciously hitting the young green shoots in the hedge with a switch.

Mignon throws her apple into the air and catches it again.

"You are a donkey," she remarks, placidly.

"Thank you. I dare say I am. At all events, I shan't be donkey enough to come to the wedding: so you may save yourself the trouble of asking me."

Mignon begins to laugh. The gate is rickety; it will not bear her weight and the want of balance caused by unrestrained merriment: so she slips down on the grass and sits there laughing until the tears roll down her cheeks.

Oswald stands regarding her with angry and most unwilling admiration.

"I do not see anything so very funny in the matter," he says, sulkily.

"I! marry an old thing like that!" she cries, between two peals of laughter. "It seems very funny to me, I can tell you."

Oswald looks at her penetratingly, but there is evidently nothing to penetrate.

"Mignon," he utters, presently, "you must either be very deceitful or very—I don't know whether to say silly or innocent."

"Say the latter," she answers, taking another bite at the apple and making a wry face over it: "it sounds better. Or you might say green like this apple. Pah!" (flinging it away), "I am sure you could have found me a better one."

"You know he is *not* old!" continues Oswald: "he is" (reluctantly) "a very good-looking fellow, and what any girl might fancy."

"She must be rather an old girl," retorts Mignon. "Not

old!" (raising her voice): "he is old enough to be my grandfather!"

"Rather a young grandfather!" says Oswald, scornfully.

"He is thirty years older than me."

"How do you know?"

"I asked him."

"Well, you *are* a cool hand, I *must* say!" remarks Oswald, halting between surprise and admiration. "But" (jealously) "why did you want to know?"

"Because Regina said he was younger than papa. And he isn't: he's a month older."

"Did he look pleased when you asked him?"

"I didn't notice. Why shouldn't he? What's the good of being ashamed of your age?"

"You know he's in love with you," cries Oswald, returning to the charge.

"Of course I do" (complacently). "Any one with half an eye can see that."

"And you encourage him?" (indignantly).

"To be sure."

"One of these days he will propose to you."

"I hope so. I want to have a real genuine offer. Some girls have had offers at fifteen."

"So have you. You know, Mignon, I made you an offer when you were fourteen."

Mignon laughs.

"My dear boy, you had nothing to offer. That doesn't count."

"No! I suppose the devotion of a faithful heart doesn't count!" says the poor lad, bitterly, "unless one's got diamonds and a title to offer as well. And pray, when he does ask you what do you intend to say?"

Mignon clasps her arms round her knees and looks thoughtfully into the distance.

"I am not sure," she answers, reflectively. "I've thought of half a dozen different ways of refusing him gracefully. I hope to goodness" (with great earnestness) "I shan't laugh in his face."

Oswald looks at her with genuine indignation.

"You are a heartless coquette!" he cries, angrily.

"You got that phrase out of a book," she answers, coolly,

"You know you did. That's just the thing of all others I have always wanted to be. I should like to have dozens of lovers at my feet and to *spurn* them all." And Mignon gives a kick with her pretty little foot at the imaginary lovers.

Oswald is quite angry by this time,—so angry that he is ready to champion his rival.

"And you mean to say you actually intend to let him propose to you, just for the pleasure of being able to say you've had an offer from a baronet?"

Mignon nods.

"Then if Regina wants to lord it over me as she used to do, I shall be able to shut her up."

"I wish to heaven," cries the young fellow, bitterly, "that I had never seen you, or at all events that I could prevent myself caring for you."

"But you can't," returns Mignon, placidly. "The worse I behave to you, the better you'll like me: you can't help yourself. Come, let us go into the orchard and look for a nice apple: I saw one getting red on one of the high boughs. You can climb up and get it for me."

"I am not going to be made a cat's paw of," says Oswald, sulkily, turning away.

"Yes, you are," she answers, putting a hand through his arm and rubbing her shoulder against it like a coaxing young cat.

He pauses, irresolute. An inspiration seizes him.

"I won't unless you let me kiss you."

"All right!" says Mignon, putting up her peach-like cheek with perfect *sang-froid*.

Oswald salutes it shyly, and then goes to the orchard, where he all but breaks his back in getting her the coveted apple.

CHAPTER VI.

"She called me silly creature, and asked me If it were not one of the truest signs of Love when men were most fond of the women who were least fit for them and used them worst? These men, my dear, said she, are very sorry creatures and know no medium. They will either, spaniel like, fawn at your feet, or be ready to jump into your lap."

Sir Charles Grandison.

NEVER once has Sir Tristram mentioned Mignon to his friend. He knows quite well what cynicisms Fred would pour forth,—how by fair words and foul, by invocations in the name of common sense, by the stinging lash of his ridicule, he would essay to turn him from his purpose. And he does not mean to be turned. All Fred could say would be but spoken to the "deaf adder who stoppeth her ears," and it might cause a coolness between them. Fred suspects nothing: he thinks his friend has taken a vast fancy to the place, and that in its neglected condition it naturally requires a good deal of his attention.

A month has elapsed since Sir Tristram first saw Mignon in the green glade, crowned with the sunlight, her young lover kneeling at her feet, and the time has come now, he thinks, to put his fate to the touch,

"To win or lose it all."

He does not much fear that he will lose it, though he does not for one moment believe that the girl is in love with him; but, from her saucy, unrestrained manner, her apparent content if not pleasure in his presence, he believes she likes him well enough not to entertain repugnance to the idea of becoming his wife, and when the happy time arrives that he can endow her with all her heart can desire, he does not despair of winning her love. He is too sensible to have the supreme confidence of a young lover: he does not scruple to acknowledge to himself the value of his auxiliary circumstances. The manner in which his offer shall be made has caused him some sleepless

nights and a great deal of anxious thought. He concludes not to make it personally. It might frighten her, or she might, in one of her wayward impulses, turn the whole thing into ridicule, and so pain him unspeakably. He decides to make his proposal in the old-fashioned manner, to her father. Sir Tristram believes himself sure of the good offices of the rest of the family.

So he writes a frank, manly letter to Captain Carlyle, which, whilst it conveys in unmistakable terms his affection for Mignon, speaks no less plainly of his consciousness of the disparity of their years and the efforts he is willing and ready to make to surmount this barrier, or at all events to reconcile her to it. He begs that Captain Carlyle and Mignon will take three days to consider his proposal, at the end of which time he hopes most anxiously for the answer that will make him the happiest man in the world.

"A handsomer letter never was written!" exclaims Captain Carlyle to his wife when he has read it to her. The mother is intensely pleased and gratified: she has no more doubt than her husband that Mignon will accept with delight so splendid a future.

"I see Mignon in the garden," says Captain Carlyle, looking out of the window. "I will go to her at once. Lucky young puss!"

Mignon is regaling herself on raspberries when she sees her father coming towards her, his face broad with smiles and a general air of satisfaction with himself and benevolence to all mankind pervading him. Mignon regards him inquiringly as she puts a red raspberry to her ruddier lips.

"I have some wonderful news for you," he cries, coming up to her. "Guess what it is!"

"Some one has died and left you a lot of money," she replies, practically.

"Better."

"Better! Then I cannot guess."

"How would you like some one to give you a lot of money without dying?" (jocosely).

Mignon makes a little face.

"I had rather they died. They might want it back again."

Her father is in too great a hurry to tell the good news to bandy words with her.

"What do you say to being 'My Lady'? What do you say to Sir Tristram Bergholt having proposed for you?"

Mignon looks, as she feels, genuinely disappointed. She has never contemplated anything so uninteresting and prosaic as the offer being made through her father.

"Well," cries Captain Carlyle, "have you nothing to say?"

"Yes: he is a stupid old donkey, and you may tell him so with my compliments."

"Mignon!" (wrathfully) "this is no subject for jesting, if you please."

"Jesting!" echoes Mignon.

Suddenly a new idea strikes her, and she stands still and looks at her father.

"Papa," she says, incredulously, "you don't mean to say that you would let me marry a man *as old as you!*"

"Why not," answers Captain Carlyle, angrily, "when he is most desirable in every way? He is *quite* a young man, devoted to you, and is everything, *I* should think, the most unreasonable woman could want."

Mignon's face assumes an unmistakably *mutine* look. She says nothing, but recommences her occupation of eating raspberries.

The expression of Captain Carlyle's face as he regards her is not paternal.

"Well?" he says, sharply.

"Well!" she replies.

"What answer am I to give him?" (with increasing irritation).

"My compliments, and if he will refer to the prayer-book he will find that a woman 'may not marry her grandfather.'"

Captain Carlyle utters a very naughty word with great emphasis, and goes off to the house in a rage. He has always been used to spoil his youngest daughter, and has not checked her pertness as he would have done that of any other member of the family. He feels an unpleasant consciousness of his inability to control her: she has become his master. A horrid idea seizes him that, if she chooses to rebel, he cannot force her to this marriage; a dreadful misgiving takes him that she *does* mean to rebel. He has seen that mulish look on her face once or twice before, and he remembers that it has ended by his

giving in. No one who had seen her lovely smile could imagine how determined Mignon can look when she frowns.

Captain Carlyle goes to his own room, banging the door behind him, and takes refuge in a cigar. Meanwhile, Mrs. Carlyle has broken the happy news to her elder daughters, and they are all sitting in joyful conclave in the drawing-room. The possibility of Mignon refusing her good fortune is as far from their thoughts as it was twenty minutes ago from her father's.

Mignon comes in.

"Let me congratulate you, 'My Lady!'" says Mary, playfully, going up to kiss her.

"And me," adds Regina, half enviously. "What luck some people have!"

"God bless you, my dear child!" utters her mother, with humid eyes.

Mignon stares at them in wide-eyed surprise for a moment, then bursts into a peal of laughter.

"What!" she cries, presently, "did you too think I was going to marry that old creature?"

"Mignon!" they all cry, in a breath, but with different accents. Mrs. Carlyle's is one of horror, Mary's of mild reproach, Regina's of sharp impatience.

The girl never heeds them, but continues to laugh.

"What a joke!" she exclaims, again. "I must go and find Gerry, and tell him," and she turns to go.

"Stay, Mignon," says Mary, detaining her. Then, kindly and firmly, "My dear, I do not think you consider what a very serious matter this is. There is no fun in it."

"Are you a born fool?" cries Regina, tartly.

Mignon is acute enough to see that all her family have ranged themselves on Sir Tristram's side. She hardens her heart and stiffens her neck and prepares to do combat with them singly and collectively. She throws herself into a chair and prepares for battle. Her mother commences the attack.

"My dear," she exclaims, with nervous energy, "you cannot surely think seriously of throwing away such a wonderful chance."

The mulish look comes into Mignon's lovely face: she answers by never a word.

Mary Carlyle is a thoroughly good woman, good in every

sense of the word, tender-hearted, charitable, unselfish, unworldly,—the very last person in the world to advocate a marriage simply for the worldly advantages it might bring. But she has conceived the highest admiration and regard for Sir Tristram: she has never seen a man yet to whom she would so gladly have given her hand and heart, even without the desirable adjuncts he possessed, had Fate willed his liking to fall on her. With Regina it is the adjuncts, not the man, she envies Mignon; though she likes him well enough. As for Mrs. Carlyle, she thinks him perfect in every way.

"Dear Mignon," says Mary, who has more influence over her sister than all the rest of the family put together, except perhaps Gerald, "what can you possibly find to object to in Sir Tristram? You have always seemed to like him."

"So I do. I like old Hawley and old Jones" (the doctor and the clergyman), "but I shouldn't like to marry them."

"My love," interposes Mrs. Carlyle, looking shocked, "how can you possibly compare them with Sir Tristram? though of course we know they are both excellent men in their way. I am sure I should have thought him just the very man to take a girl's fancy."

"But you only look at him with your own eyes, which are old, mamma," retorts Mignon: "you cannot know the least how a girl would feel."

"I have been young, my dear, and I do not think I am so old that I cannot remember how I felt as a girl."

"Papa was young," interrupts Mignon. "You never were asked to marry an old man."

"How you harp upon his being old!" cries Regina. "He is just in his prime: there is not the slightest trace of age either in his face or figure."

"He is thirty years older than I am," says Mignon, with fire, "and it is shameful of you all to want to sell me to an old man. I won't be sold! I would rather sweep a crossing."

"My dear," interposes her mother, "how can you talk in such a dreadful way! I don't know what your papa will say if you refuse Sir Tristram: he will be quite broken-hearted."

"Broken-hearted!" echoes Mignon, scornfully. "How will he be worse off than he was a month ago, before we ever saw him? I wish to heaven" (with angry energy) "he had gone to the bottom of the sea, or been eaten up by bears, or mur-

dered by savages, on his fine travels. Papa broken-hearted!" (her voice more and more *crescendo*) "if he is, it will only be because he can't get the man's shooting or wine or something or other, and it doesn't seem to matter to anybody about *my* being broken-hearted!"

Mrs. Carlyle is too shocked to make any rejoinder, and, besides, she has never had much control over her youngest daughter. Mignon's organ of veneration, if she has one at all, is of the very smallest. Mary is the only person for whom she feels any approach to respect. Having lashed herself up into a rage, she is not to be stopped.

"I am only seventeen," she cries, "not out yet, and I have been looking forward to going out and dancing and—and having lovers and enjoying myself, and here you all want to tie me down to an old man to mope my life out, and all for the sake of his nasty, beastly, horrid money! But I won't! I WON'T! I WON'T!!! not for any of you, not for all of you, if you worry me morning, noon, and night! not if you shut me up and keep me on bread and water for a year! *not if you kill me!*"

Mignon's lovely face is inflamed with passion, but it is still lovely: I am not sure that it is not lovelier than ever. The carnation is in her fair cheeks, her dark-blue eyes flash with immense brilliancy, her quivering lips are pouted with scorn and anger: she is a lovely picture of a lovely shrew! the world-famed Katherine never outdid her in expression.

"Mignon," says Regina, calmly, at this juncture, "if you have attained, as I should imagine, the highest pitch of fury of which your sweet disposition is capable, will you listen to me for a moment?"

Mignon glares at her sister in silence. Regina takes the silence for consent.

"You said just now," she proceeds, "that you wanted to go out and dance and have lovers and enjoy yourself. How much of that sort of thing do you suppose you are going to get here? You might judge of that by the immense amount of dissipation you have seen Mary and myself enjoy. Now, if you marry Sir Tristram, you can go to balls and parties every night of your life, you will be presented at court, you will have as many new dresses and as much admiration as your heart can desire."

"What's the use of going to balls, if I can't dance?" pouts Mignon, giving ear, however, to her sister's discourse.

"Why should you not dance, pray?"

"I thought people didn't dance after they were married."

"Ah!" returns Regina, dryly, "that was in the good old-fashioned days. Now the married women dance and flirt, and the unmarried ones sit out."

"Regina!" cries Mary.

Regina does not heed her, but continues. "You have not a particle of affection in your composition, you are very vain, you care for nothing but having your own way: what does it matter to you that you are not in love with Sir Tristram? you would not care for the Archangel Michael long: it is not in your nature. Who knows? if you marry this man, you may be the reigning belle in London next season. You are lovely, as you are perfectly aware; and if you are rich and titled, your charms will be enhanced fourfold. It is worth consideration whether you will be a woman of fashion, surrounded by everything your heart can desire, or throw away this chance and sink into a forlorn old maid, or perhaps Mrs. Oswald Carey, with twopence a year."

"Mrs. Oswald Carey!" echoes Mignon, scornfully, going out, that Regina may not have the satisfaction of seeing how much impression she has made.

"Regina," cries Mary, with righteous indignation, "how *can* you talk to the child in that way? It is wicked of you?"

"At all events," replies her sister, "my practical remarks have done more good to the cause than anything you have said or are likely to say."

"If I did not believe she would be happy with Sir Tristram, and grow to love him for his own sake, not for what he can give her, I would dissuade her from marrying him with all my might, even if she were inclined to it," says Mary, emphatically.

Captain Carlyle, after much cogitation and numerous cigars, comes to a conclusion about the best mode of attacking Mignon. He takes plenty of time to mature his ideas; he even sleeps upon them. His wife is forbidden to speak to him on the subject. Mignon he treats with perfect kindness and good humor: she begins to think that he has given up the idea of marrying her to Sir Tristram. Regina's words have sunk

deep into her breast. Oh, if she could only have all those fine things without the husband! She is not one whit more inclined to the thought of that part of it than before.

The next morning, Mignon receives a message that her father would like to speak to her in his study. "Ah!" she thinks, "he is going to try again." And she shuts her small red mouth and marches into the room, looking like a young Corday brought before her judges, firm, resolved, composed.

Captain Carlyle realizes at a glance all he has to contend with; and it does not make his task easier. Of one thing he is steadfastly resolved: nothing shall make him lose his temper.

Mignon enters the room, and, still retaining the handle of the door, says,—

"Do you want me, papa?"

"Yes, my dear" (affectionately). "Come and sit down. I want to have a little talk with you."

"I had rather stand."

Mignon feels morally stronger when she is on her feet.

"Oblige me, my dear" (suavely), "by taking that seat."

The blue eyes and red lips look more rebellious than ever as their owner obeys.

"You guess, no doubt, on what subject I wish to speak to you," proceeds her father, assuming an air of ease he is far from feeling. So much hangs upon this interview.

Mignon replies by neither word, look, nor sign.

"It has always been my endeavor," continues Captain Carlyle, "to make my children happy: in fact, I may say my life has been one constant sacrifice to their interests."

He keeps his eyes averted from Mignon as he utters this: he knows perfectly well that humbug will not go down with her, and he would rather not see, or seem to see, the incredulous look that he rightly guesses is expressed on her face.

The young are terrible critics when they are not imbued with much faith or veneration. Even Fred Conyngham's face could not betoken more cynical disbelief than this pretty young girl's. Mignon is fond of her father in a way, but the very selfishness she inherits from him makes her more keenly alive to his. She is thinking, "Great sacrifices, indeed! when you are always going away and enjoying yourself whilst we are moped to death at home and can hardly ever have new

clothes because you spend all the money." She does not, however, utter her thoughts aloud: she has been brought up too well to break into any open disrespect towards him. But all the time of his oration she continues to make little cynical inward comments.

"I should be the last man in the world, I hope," he proceeds, with the emphasis acquired from a *mens conscia recti*, "to endeavor to influence a child of mine against her own good and happiness. If I were not assured that a marriage with Sir Tristram Bergholt would insure both, believe me, my dear child, I would rather cut off my right hand than urge it."

Here Captain Carlyle turns his candid and affectionate gaze upon his daughter's face; but such open and utter disbelief is expressed upon it that he removes it again.

"You are too young and inexperienced," he hurries on, "to know the enormous worldly advantages such a marriage offers you,—the means of entering into society, the *highest* society, the luxury which will permit you to gratify your most extravagant desires, for I am sure Sir Tristram is the most generous of men and would prove a thoroughly indulgent husband." (Mignon makes a wry face.) "But, after all, this is not what I am most anxious to speak to you about. I want you to have some little thought for others." ("Ah!" thinks Mignon, "now we are coming to the point.") "You are fond of Gerry: poor fellow! you know what a frightful disappointment he has had, how he has been made a victim of his uncle's *cruel treachery*, and I am afraid, poor lad! there is worse misfortune yet in store for him."

Mignon pricks up her ears: the one soft spot in her hard little heart is love for Gerry.

"Worse!" she echoes. "What worse can there be?"

Captain Carlyle averts his face.

"I am going to tell you something that I have carefully kept from every one up to this time. If I tell you, will you promise to keep my secret?"

Mignon nods.

"I was anxious, as you know, to get a commission for him, but could not afford the expense of it, nor of preparing him for the army. I was told, by a person in whom I placed implicit confidence, of an investment that was not only most advantageous but perfectly safe——"

"And you lost the money!" interrupts Mignon. Then, sorrowfully, "Poor Gerry!"

Her father bends his head. "So that I am worse off than I was before; and not only can I do nothing for Gerry, but most probably we shall have to leave this place and go somewhere to retrench. As for Gerry, poor fellow, I hardly like to think of it, but I'm very much afraid he'll have to go to South America."

"South America!" cries Mignon, a horrible pain gnawing at her heart; "why South America?"

"Because I have had an offer from a mercantile house there to take him as a clerk,—the only opening for him I can hear of. It will be an awful thing for him, poor lad, going so far from home and having to associate with men utterly inferior to him; but he can't stop at home eating the bread of idleness."

Mignon clasps her hands and bites her lip hard to keep back the rising tears. Gerry, her handsome, aristocratic brother, with his grand ideas, thousands of miles over the seas, homesick, heartsick, compelled to herd with low associates! She walks across the room and stands in front of her father, and looks him through and through with her deep, searching eyes.

"Is this true?" she says; "or are you only trying to work upon my feelings to get me to do what you want?"

"It is gospel truth," he answers, returning her look.

She goes to the window and looks out. A cold hand seems to be grasping her heart: the roses in the garden upon which she looks are blurred and misty: for the first time, sorrow has crept into her heart and made itself at home there. Then she turns away, and goes out of the room, without a word. Her father does not attempt to stop her; he knows he has made his impression, and is content.

CHAPTER VII.

"ARCITE.—Yes, I love her,
And if the Lives of all my Name lay on it,
I must do so, I love her with all my soul;
If that will lose ye, farewel Palamon."

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

"Oui, elle est capricieuse, j'en demeure d'accord: mais tout sied bien aux belles; on souffre tout des belles." *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme.*

MIGNON picks up her hat from the hall chair where she left it when she obeyed her father's summons, and takes her way across the common to The Warren. It is so much her habit to go there that she forgets to think whom it belongs to, or, in her indignation against its owner for having placed her in this horrible dilemma, she would probably turn her back upon it. Her favorite haunt is a green glade where are big trees with moss-covered boles and wild flowers run riot in the long grass. Mignon rarely courts solitude, but to-day she wants to think with no eyes to watch her save those of the wild blossoms, deep blue and tender pink, gold-colored and starry white. The little Scotch terrier, seeing her go out alone, has followed to take care of her; but he is not intrusive nor inquisitive; he lies down at a little distance, with his nose between his paws and one eye open; he wishes it to be distinctly understood that he has not come to pry, but is only in attendance in case of being wanted. Dogs have a delicate way of "effacing themselves" that their superior (?) masters might now and then copy with advantage.

Mignon throws herself down on the warm, scented grass, and leans her head against one of the great velvety boles. She is thinking of Gerry. In her mind's eye, she sees him in a big ship, ploughing the deep, sick, lonely, heart-broken. Gerry, so refined, "the little swell" as he had been christened by his companions, cut off from all that was pleasant or worth having in life. Gerry, whose one idea was to be a soldier, to be shut up in a horrid counting-house with low clerks. Mignon has the supreme contempt for trade that most children of poor

soldiers entertain. And it lies in her power to avert this grievous future for him and to replace it by one as delightful and glorious as only young day-dreamers can conceive. But at what a cost! Mignon shudders. She is, as I have said, selfish: the beauty of self-sacrifice is a sealed book to her. Then Regina's words come back to her, and she pictures herself a queen of beauty, the cynosure of all eyes (she has always craved for admiration), wealth unbounded, unlimited (of this, having no experience, her views are very vague, not to say Oriental). She may save Gerry and open fairy-land to herself at one stroke. But the husband! horrid thought! He might die, though. Sir Tristram would feel highly delighted and flattered, no doubt, could he be aware of what is passing in the mind of his young love.

"Yonnie! Yonnie!" Mignon hears herself called in the distance. The terrier pricks up his ears. It is Gerald, who still calls her by the name his baby-lips first lisped. "Yonnie! Yonnie!" cries the voice, coming nearer, and Mignon answers it by a good, ringing, most unladylike "Hullo!"

"You little pig!" he cries, coming up breathless, "you've stolen a march upon me and been after those gooseberries."

"*I haven't*," cries Mignon, stung to indignation by the base accusation. "I never thought of them."

"Oh, all right!" he answers, throwing himself down full length on the grass and permitting the terrier to pay him the delicate attention of licking his nose.

Mignon looks at the bonnie golden head lying on the grass, and thinks again of the deep sea and the counting-house, and her soul is troubled within her.

"Gerry," she says, presently, "how would you like to go to South America?"

"I shouldn't mind," he answers, nonchalantly. "Hi! good dog, fetch him out! fetch him out!" as he and the terrier catch sight simultaneously of a little white tuft bobbing up and down among the bracken. Pepper, undeterred by the recollection of many futile chases, dashes off *ventre à terre*. "You get stunning sport there."

"I don't mean for sport," says Mignon, forgetful or regardless of her father's injunction for secrecy. "I mean, to go and be a clerk in a merchant's house there."

"What!" cries Gerald, a red flush coming to his face, as he

raises himself on one elbow to look at Mignon. A horrid suspicion smites him that she is not joking.

She repeats the question coolly.

"What! go into a beastly office with a lot of horrid cads! What rot you talk, Mignon!" (angrily).

"I am not talking rot," she replies. Then, after a moment's pause, "which would you rather?—be out in South America miserable, as of course you would be, and know that I was happy at home, or get your commission and lead a jolly life such as you've looked forward to, and let me be miserable?"

An inkling of her meaning comes to him, but he makes no answer, only waits to hear more.

"Well?" she says.

"When you explain yourself, I will answer you."

"Can't you guess? How dull you must be! Sir Tristram wants to marry me. If I consent, he will buy you a commission and start you in life, and I shall be *wretched*. If I refuse (papa has been speculating and losing money), you will have to go to South America and earn your living. He told me so."

Gerald looks at his sister's golden head lying against the dark tree-trunk, and away into the distance where the sunlight lies in a great flood upon the open. He looks, but does not see the sunshine: all seems very dark and bitter to him.

He is a good-hearted lad: though he is like Mignon in face, he does not share her selfish disposition: in character he is like his mother, as she is like her father.

Mignon watches him. He is deep in thought; his lip quivers, his hand clutches the flower-strewn grass, his eyes have a sightless, far-off look. Pepper has come back from his fruitless hunt, breathless and panting, and is trying to enlist his young master's sympathy: but Gerald does not notice him.

After a time, the lad lifts his blonde head and looks at his sister.

"He *is* too old for you, but he is a good fellow. *Could* you not like him, Yonnie?"

"Ah!" says Mignon, bitterly, "you are like all the rest of them. You would sell me too."

"No, no, no!" he cries, springing up and putting his arms round her; "*that* I would not. Don't think about me, Yonnie dear. He *is* too old; it would be a shame: you shan't make any sacrifice for me, I swear. I can earn my

bread somehow without turning clerk. Why, I'd sooner go as a private into a cavalry regiment: lots of gentlemen have done it before me."

Mignon looks at his flushed, noble face: some strange emotion seizes her; she flings her arms round his neck and bursts into a passion of tears.

Gerry has never seen her cry before, except in spite or anger; not often then. He is dreadfully distressed, and does all he can think of to soothe her.

"Yonnie! dear, darling little Yonnie, don't cry! they shan't marry you to him! no one shall vex or hurt you while I'm by!"

All this adds fuel to the fire, or rather water to the fountain, for it makes Mignon cry more than ever. When people who are not used to the melting mood give way to tears, it is a very serious affair. Pepper is distressed beyond measure: he looks from one to the other and wags his tail inquiringly, not knowing whose part to take, or whether he is called upon to defend them both against some common foe.

After a time Mignon recovers herself and begins to smile through her tears. She is not so pretty when she cries as when she laughs, but nothing in the world could make her face ugly: it is only less beautiful.

"Let us come and eat the gooseberries," she says, rising, "or the workmen will get them."

She says no more about Sir Tristram, only enjoins her brother to strict secrecy on the subject. In the afternoon she seeks out Regina and puts various questions to her as to the sort of life she may expect to lead if she becomes Lady Bergholt. Regina makes the most of the opportunity, and draws such pictures of society, gay doings, Opera boxes, diamonds, fair apparel, carriages and horses, servants and houses, that Mignon, dazzled, begins to think there may be more compensation for her sacrifice than the approval of her own conscience and Gerry's gratitude.

That evening she announces to Captain Carlyle her intention of accepting Sir Tristram.

"God bless you, my dear, dearest child!" cries the delighted father, advancing in an access of paternal affection to embrace her.

Mignon puts up both her hands with a gesture of repulsion.

"No, no!" she says, with an accent of the liveliest emotion: "do not come near me! do not touch me!"

Captain Carlyle refrains himself. She must not be agitated under any circumstances, he thinks.

"I accept him on *one* condition," she says; "on *one* condition only. You will go and see him,—writing won't do,—and you will tell him that I don't care two straws about him, and that I never shall. Tell him that I am going to marry him entirely on Gerry's account, and if he likes to have me after that, he can, but I shall think precious little of him. Do you promise me on your word of honor to tell him every word I have said?"

"Certainly, my dear, if you wish it."

"On your honor?"

"On my honor."

Therewith Mignon turns and goes out, and Captain Carlyle, radiant with triumph, begins to consider how he can keep his word to Mignon and yet give an answer to Sir Tristram which shall not affront him. He knows quite well that if he gives her message *verbatim* he will never have the baronet for his son-in-law.

The following morning he starts joyously on his errand, having first telegraphed to Sir Tristram to announce his visit.

The latter is in a fever of anxiety. A thousand times has he cursed his own folly for giving Mignon three days to make up her mind: he has undergone torments, expecting a letter by every post, and going from the hotel to his club, his club back to the hotel, to see if one has arrived. Why should they keep him in this agonizing suspense? if the answer is favorable, Captain Carlyle might have sent it at once; if not, there is all the more reason for not delaying. He dares not go near Mr. Conyngham; he is so restless he feels sure he should betray himself, so he makes an excuse and keeps out of his way. He receives Captain Carlyle's telegram with immense satisfaction; and yet he knows not whether to augur well or ill from his seeking a personal interview. His anxiety is at an end when Mignon's father, coming into the room, grasps him by the hand, and, with joyful emotion, greets him as a future and honored member of his family. A knot rises in Sir Tristram's throat: he cannot speak for a moment, the relief is so great: he can only grasp Captain Carlyle's hand

with a firm, true clasp, vowing in his heart to be all a father can desire, to his child.

The hardest part of Captain Carlyle's task is taken from him by Sir Tristram's generosity. He speaks almost at once of his intentions with regard to Gerald. He is Mignon's twin brother, he looks upon him as part of her. Sir Tristram's dearest wish is to provide for his future as well as for Mignon's. Captain Carlyle is really touched: how *can* he deliver the conditions under which Mignon's consent has been given? He hesitates, hums and hahs. Sir Tristram, who is extremely sensitive, sees there is something more to be said, and half surmises its nature.

"Mignon has the highest regard for you," begins the unhappy father, at last, dashing at his subject, "but of course she is very young,—a mere child,—and you, you will not expect too much of her at first."

Sir Tristram feels a pain shoot through his heart: it is the first taste of the dregs of this sweet cup.

"Of course," he says, hurriedly, "I know I am *very* much older than she is. I cannot hope to inspire any ardent feeling in her all at once; but—but if I thought my devotion would not ultimately win a return from her, I—I—nothing would induce me to seek her hand."

"It will; it will. I have not a doubt of it. All I meant to hint was that she is very young and innocent and wayward; we have spoilt her sadly, I fear. I want to put you on your guard: you have seen her wilful ways, you know what she is; I mean, if she appears cold or shy or strange at first, you will not be vexed or offended——"

"Of course not; of course not," Sir Tristram answers, the pain at his heart growing deeper and deeper. "But let me ask you one question. Has any pressure *of any kind* been put on your daughter to induce her to accept me?"

"No, I assure you. Your offer was put before her; she took time to consider it, and gave me her answer last night."

"And she is *quite* willing to marry me?"

"*Quite* willing."

"On your word of honor? Forgive me; but this is a very serious matter."

"On my word of honor."

Sir Tristram is perforce satisfied, but his heart is not so light

as he would have thought it needs must be, starting with Mignon's father for the cottage as her accepted lover.

Mrs. Carlyle and her elder daughters have spent the morning in entreating Mignon to receive Sir Tristram in a proper and becoming way. Regina's argument as usual makes the most impression.

"If you look black at him and treat him as if you did not care for him, he is just the sort of man to give you up there and then; and then good-by to all the fine future we have been talking about."

Late in the afternoon, Mignon, in her room, hears the sound of wheels at the gate. Looking out, she sees two figures, and concludes that her martyrdom has commenced. She feels an unreasoning hatred of Sir Tristram; but for Regina's hint, she would go to meet him with a sullen frown; but she is afraid, both for her own sake and for Gerry's. She will not smooth her hair nor try to make herself more fair; on the contrary, she elects to go down with ruffled locks and dress thrown on anyhow. But he never remarks it; he is fighting with his fears and nervousness; he longs to take his beautiful darling in his arms and kiss her, but dares not. Mindful of her father's hint, he trembles lest he should alarm or disgust her. So, when she enters, he goes towards her, takes her reluctant hand, kisses it with a noble courtesy, and says,—

"You have made me very happy."

Mignon is relieved. A horrible suspicion has possessed her all the day that he will want to kiss her; and she is so grateful for his forbearance that she smiles quite graciously upon him.

"Believe me," he utters, fervently, "that anything, everything in the world I can do to win your love and further your happiness I *will* do."

Here is a golden opportunity. Mignon has not a delicate mind: she grasps it.

"Will you get Gerry his commission?" she asks.

"Everything that I would do for my own brother, if I had one, I will do for him," Sir Tristram answers, heartily, pained nevertheless that this element of bargaining should be introduced so quickly into his romance.

"And—and—" (Mignon has the grace to hesitate this time) "will you let me do just as I like, and go to balls and theatres and dance?"

"You shall do and have everything you can desire as far as it lies in my power," he answers, the pain growing ever deeper. "Will you trust me?"

Mignon nods.

"Let us go out," she says: "it is too fine to stop in-doors." And he assents, with a vague feeling of disappointment.

"Shall we go to The Warren?" he says, and, Mignon being agreeable, they start together. All the way the vain young puss is stealing furtive glances at her little hand, upon which big diamonds are flashing. They are the first token of glories to come.

When Sir Tristram returns to town that evening, he goes straight to Fred Conyngham's rooms. His friend is not there, —is dining out, his servant says. Sir Tristram sits down to await his return; he has plenty of food for reflection to occupy him meantime. An hour elapses before he hears Fred's step on the stairs; a moment later he enters.

"At last!" he exclaims. "I began to imagine you were lost, and had serious thoughts of advertising for you in the 'agony column.' Have you been 'in search of a wife,' in imitation of Mrs. Hannah More's interesting hero?"

"I have not only been in search of but have found her," answers Sir Tristram. "I suppose it would be adding insult to injury to ask your congratulations?"

Fred utters a deep-drawn sigh. "*I* congratulate you?" he says, in a melancholy tone. "Never! but I will mingle my tears with yours when the time comes for it, poor old boy! Well" (throwing himself into a chair with a still deeper sigh), "begin your rhapsodies! get through them as quickly as you can. Or stay! let me guess. The adored object is a child, your ideal seventeen; she is as beautiful as an angel, and she has not a penny to her fortune."

"Who told you?" cries Sir Tristram, eagerly.

"No one! it was a pure guess on my part. And pray" (looking fixedly at his friend), "is she fond of you?"

The color deepens in Sir Tristram's cheek; he has never told a lie in his life.

"I hope to make her so."

"Oh!" says Fred, not removing his shrewd eyes from his friend's face. "And is she going to marry you of her own free will, or has she been urged to it by her family?"

"Of her own free will."

"So much the worse," utters Fred. "She must be heartless and mercenary. It is unnatural for seventeen to marry a man it is not fond of, of its own free will. Is she town-bred or country-bred?"

"Country," answers Sir Tristram, shortly. "She is fresh and innocent as a daisy; I—I believe she does like me, but she has little wilful, teasing ways, and——Fred" (hotly), "I take it as very unfriendly on your part to say these things. You perhaps do not think how you hurt me with your caustic speech."

Fred jumps up and holds out his hand.

"Dear old Tristram," he says, heartily, "forgive me. I am a brutal old Diogenes, and only fit for a tub. If my tongue is rough and bitter, you know my heart wishes nothing better than to see the lie given to its prognostications. There! I have had my little spiteful say, and I wish you all the joy life can give with your lovely little country rose; she must be charming indeed if I ever get to think her half good enough for you."

And so the friends clasp hands, with hearty sympathy on one side and hearty forgiveness on the other.

CHAPTER VIII.

"On cite comme une grosse affaire un astronome tombé dans un puits, pendant qu'il cherchait dans le ciel une etoile: qu'on essaye donc de compter ceux qui, sans être astronomes, ont fait la même chûte en cherchant une femme, soit au ciel, soit sur la terre."

THE wedding is fixed for October. Sir Tristram does not wish to lose more time than he can help: ever since he has been in love with Mignon, the thought of his age, which never before embarrassed him, troubles him: he would gladly give two-thirds of his income to be put back ten years. The hearty *empressement* with which, on his return after three years' absence, he has been greeted by his fair friends, might have helped to reassure him; but no! Mignon shows him

constantly by the most galling little words and hints that she thinks him old, and all the flattery, direct or implied, of other women can do nothing for him. His glass shows him every morning a man in the very prime and vigor of life, in the possession of as perfect health and strength as he enjoyed at twenty, a man to whom the word "old" is so totally inappropriate that every one but a silly wayward child would laugh to scorn the bare idea of its being applied to him. No matter! Mignon has pronounced him old, and her verdict rankles bitterly in his breast. Not for his own sake. He only wants her to think him young enough to bestow her love on, young enough to regard as a lover.

Since the marriage is irrevocably decided upon, Mignon does not much care when it takes place. She considers being engaged detestable, disgusting: better have the whole thing over and done with. There *are* times when she regards her future with extreme complacency; for instance, when Sir Tristram is absent, when Regina betrays envy of her, when she feels herself the object of the respectful solicitude of their few neighbors. It is pleasant to make excursions to London to buy and order lovely apparel for which she has *carte blanche*, Sir Tristram being Captain Carlyle's banker on the occasion, although he insists upon his generosity being kept secret. It is delightful to do a thing handsomely at some one else's expense and to get all the credit of it: so Captain Carlyle finds. A carriage-and-pair always awaits Mignon on her arrival in London; she does her shopping in grand style, accompanied usually by Regina, and charming little lunches are prepared for her at Sir Tristram's hotel. On one occasion she goes to lunch with Mr. Conyngham, who is in town for a couple of days *en route* for Scotland and grouse-shooting. Sir Tristram feels as nervous as a school-boy about this meeting between Mignon and his dearest friend: he has an intense dread that she will be wayward and he cynical. Neither fear is realized. Mignon is as lovely and as gracious as an angel. Fred assumes an air of *bonhomie* that no less astonishes than enchants his friend. Mignon and Regina both go away under the impression that if ever there was a genial, benevolent mortal, a genuine lover of his kind, a perfect philanthropist, that mortal is Mr. Conyngham; and Sir Tristram is careful not to undeceive them.

Fred, who has watched Mignon intently all the time, gives utterance as soon as she departs to this involved reflection:

"She is very lovely. Poor Tristram!"

What does he mean?

The lunch is in perfect taste, recherché, ethereal-looking, but satisfying. A profusion of flowers, fruit, delicious sweets, choice bonbons, feasts the eyes, whilst the other senses are not neglected. Mr. Conyngham's lunch is a perfect success. Regina, ignorant of his anti-matrimonial ideas, entertains some hopes that she has made an impression.

But Mignon does not always take a palmy view of her marriage. There are occasions, not unfrequent ones, when she is filled with rage and horror at the thought, and feels like some wild young thing caught in a trap. She persists in regarding it as a sacrifice made for Gerry: she will not allow to herself for an instant that her own ambition had any share in her decision. Gerry is away at a "crammer's:" she misses him dreadfully: she has no one to exercise her exuberant spirits upon: all the others are "so slow," Mignon gets the spleen, and vents it upon every one about her, notably Sir Tristram. Dearly as he loves her, inclined as he is to see nothing but her loveliness and her perfection, he cannot but feel hurt and shocked sometimes at her behavior. But he defends her gallantly against himself. She is unsettled: when they are *once married* she will return to the sweet winning ways he *fancies* she had when he first knew her.

It is a lovely afternoon in September. Sir Tristram, who has taken up his abode at The Warren, is away on business, and Mignon is in one of her very worst tempers. She rages violently against the thought of her marriage; she has terrified her family by declaring to them that she will tell Sir Tristram to his face as soon as he returns that she hates him; and finally she departs across the common to her favorite glade in order to have it out with herself. The heather is purpling now, but Mignon is in no humor to heed nature's beauties; the fern in the glade has grown up tall and strong and hides the flower-gems in the "enamelled sward." Mignon flings herself down and tears up the moss and grass vindictively with her pretty little hands: she cannot wreak her vengeance on the fern; it returns her violence with interest and makes her fingers smart.

"What a shame!" she says, talking to the trees and the rabbits,—"what a cruel wicked shame, to sell me to a man I hate! Yes, I hate him for marrying me, and he knows I hate him, and he still insists on buying me! He shall know what I think of him,—if not before, afterwards. I wish he was dead!"

And Mignon, having lashed herself into unbearable rage, bursts into angry, spiteful sobs. And so Oswald Carey, coming to seek, finds her. Poor lad! Ever since he heard of her engagement he has been beside himself with misery. He has loved her with such a faithful love all these years, and, though she has gibed at and flouted him, made a slave and a scapegoat of him, somehow he has always persuaded himself that she does really care for him and that it is only "her way." He has never built a *château d' Espagne* of which she was not châtelaine, never pictured a future in which hers was not the most prominent form, never had a thought of ambition except to glorify her. And his ewe lamb is wrested from him by the strong hand of the rich man, his youth and love are as reeds against the arms of wealth and nobility. Poor lad! heart-sore and wretched as he is, he cannot tear himself from the sight of her, though he never comes near when Sir Tristram is by, and would sooner die of hunger and thirst than share one of his gifts to Mignon.

She does not hear his footsteps on the velvet moss: he is witness of her tears and sobs, and nothing intimates to her that her pain and anger are watched by other eyes. Poor fellow! his honest heart shares her distress, the tears are in his own eyes, he wants to console her, but he hardly dares announce his presence. Suddenly she looks up, sees him, and springs to a sitting posture. She is glad to have a victim upon whom to vent her wrath.

"How dare you come and pry after me?" she cries, with flashing eyes in which the tears are still standing. "Don't you know how mean it is to sneak about and spy upon one? No gentleman would do it!"

"Don't be angry with me, Mignon," he says, humbly. "I only came to look for you. I never thought of finding you like this."

"Then now perhaps you will go away again. It is enough to make any one wretched only to look at your miserable, cadaverous face."

"It was not that made you cry," he says, gently, throwing himself down in front of her.

"It is no business of yours. I shall cry if I choose" (with increased petulance). "You need not think I was crying because I am unhappy. I was crying to—to amuse myself."

"You were crying because you don't want to marry Sir Tristram," cries Oswald, eagerly: "you can't deceive me. Oh, Mignon, darling Mignon, stop before it's too late! you will be wretched if you marry him; no amount of money or jewels or fine clothes will make up for it. If you dread the *idea*, what will the *reality* be?"

"You are not to call me darling," says Mignon, with dignity; then, happily bethinking her of the unkindest cut of all, "Sir Tristram would not like it."

Poor Oswald bites his lip and clenches his fingers. Mignon begins to feel better. In her heart she is rather fond of Oswald, fonder now than before, but he is her fetich: she loves to bang and beat him when she is displeased. True, he is not the offender, but that rather adds zest to her vengeance.

"You do not, cannot care for him," Oswald says, presently, —"a man nearly three times your age."

"Oh!" retorts Mignon; "I thought you said once he was a man 'any girl might fancy.'"

"Did I? I don't believe it. If I did, I was a fool."

"That is too apparent to be contradicted," says Mignon. She is getting quite good-tempered now she has some one to make uncomfortable.

"Yes," he utters, bitterly, "that is true enough. I *am* a fool, or I should not be here. You were quite right when you said in the summer that the worse you treated me the more I should care for you."

Mignon throws back her pretty head and laughs: she has not a grain of sympathy for him: on the contrary, she likes to make him suffer: she has to, and why should he not as well?

"Don't pull such a long face, 'Sir Knight of the Doleful Countenance!'" she says.

"Ah!" he answers, more bitterly still, "I cannot always dance because you pipe, nor laugh for your pleasure when I've got the heart-ache."

"Heart-ache! fiddlesticks! Why should *you* have the

heart-ache? *You* haven't got to marry a man you hate!" says Mignon, betraying herself unintentionally.

Oswald comes nearer and takes her hand: for a wonder she permits him. There is an impassioned look in his faithful, dog-like eyes as he exclaims,—

"Dearest Mignon, think seriously what you are going to do! Remember, it is not for a little while, it is perhaps for all your life, at all events for the best years of it."

"I am afraid he is not at all delicate," remarks Mignon, thoughtfully. "He might live to be eighty. Ugh! I should be fifty then."

"And when it's once done, it can't be undone," continues Oswald.

"No," assents Mignon, gravely. "As the gipsy told me the other day, I was going to tie a knot with my tongue I couldn't untie with my teeth. Oh, Oswald! it was such fun! We were at the gate, and an old brown cunning-looking gipsy came along and wanted to tell our fortunes, so I insisted on having mine told. And what do you think she said?" The memory of it is so irresistibly mirth-provoking that Mignon throws herself back and laughs one of those bewitching laughs that harass the souls of her lovers. She has no view to effect now: it is the pure ebullition of her delight. "She said, there was many a heart sore with thinking of my bright eyes, and one in particular (that's you, I suppose), and I was going to meet a dark young man soon who'd fall in love with me the first moment he ever clapped eyes on me, and—and" (Mignon laughs till the tears roll down her cheeks) "and she took Sir Tristram for my father, and oh (my side aches so I don't think I can tell you)!" Mignon is so convulsed she is obliged to bury her face in the grass.

"Well?" says Oswald, catching the contagion, though he is not yet in possession of the joke.

"She said she was quite sure he wasn't one of the hard-hearted fathers and wouldn't stand in the way of two fond hearts."

Having jerked out her story between peals of laughter, Mignon throws herself down again and gives vent to her unrestrained mirth. Oswald laughs; but he is a good-hearted fellow and sensitive, and he cannot help feeling for his rival in such an awful position.

"What did he say?" he asks.

"I don't know," Mignon answers, sitting up and wiping the tears from her cheeks. "I turned and fled, and never stopped till I got to my own room, where I nearly died."

Oswald contemplates her in thoughtful silence.

"A penny for your thoughts," she says, becoming conscious of his attentive scrutiny.

"You would not care to hear them."

"Yes, I should." Mignon is intensely inquisitive. "Do tell me!" (coaxingly).

"I was thinking, if you were not so lovely, how people would hate you!"

Mignon colors.

"You are a beast," she says.

"Beast and fool!" he answers: "you have called me both this afternoon. They are pretty words in a pretty girl's mouth."

"And so you are,—both," she answers; "and I hate you. Now you can go. If *you* don't, *I* shall."

"No, you won't," cries the poor lad, humbly. "I only said if you were *not* lovely; but you are: so you may do anything and people only love you all the better."

Mignon is mollified, and they fall to friendly talk. Oswald is urging her to fly with him from the hated marriage: he has a pretty little plan cut and dried for carrying her off under the very noses of both lover and father. She lets him talk on: she has not the remotest idea of accepting his protection, but the idea of an elopement is rather romantic, and pleases her.

Oswald is all in hot, eager earnest: he verily believes he has made some impression on her; and she allows him to think so.

The sun is well on his downward journey through the blue sky; he is giving broad farewell smiles to the big tree-trunks, to the velvet moss and the green fern; he lies redly on Mignon's fair head and kindles her blue eyes, that look like sapphires, only that no sapphire was ever so deep, so brilliant, or so exquisitely blue.

"I must go," she says. "He is coming back to-night, and we dine at eight."

As the words are yet on her lips, there is a sound of wheels,

and Sir Tristram's dog-cart passes the end of the glade. He sees the two standing together, and wonders with secret pain if Mignon cares for the lad.

"You will think over what I have said, won't you, darling?" says Oswald, eagerly; and she nods assent.

All that evening Mignon is so supremely capricious and tormenting that Sir Tristram's suspicions are confirmed. He passes a night of sleepless misery. Early the next morning he sends a note asking Captain Carlyle to come to him. When the latter arrives, he is so agitated he can scarcely command his voice.

"My dear fellow," cries his father-in-law elect, "what ails you? You look downright ill!"

"Look here, Carlyle," says Sir Tristram: "I fear I have been guilty of an egregious act of folly in thinking it possible your daughter could ever come to care for me. Don't interrupt me!—it is evident from the way she treats me that she is indifferent to me; and, God knows! I would rather cut off my right hand than marry her, poor child, if I thought she shrank from me. It will be an awful blow to me; but anything" (agitatedly), "anything rather than let her suffer. Let me still be the friend of the family, let me look on Gerald as a brother, or a son; but I entreat you to tell me if Mignon does not care for me, or—or cares for some one else. Don't leave it till it is too late, for heaven's sake!"

Captain Carlyle is wellnigh distraught.

"What do you mean?" he cries. "She has never seen any one. Whom else *could* she care for?"

"Young Carey," he replies. "I have seen from the first that he was fond of her; and last night I saw them standing together, and he seemed agitated."

"Curse him!" mutters Captain Carlyle, under his breath.

What! let Sir Tristram slip between his fingers, topple down this tower of strength, snap the mainstay of his future! Never! Before he leaves The Warren, he succeeds in persuading Sir Tristram that there is no doubt as to Mignon's affection for him, that she has freely and willingly chosen him, and that all these capricious airs are simply the result of her wilfulness and her spoilt childishness.

As he walks back to the cottage he is "breathing vengeance" against Oswald and Mignon. He is a passionate man,

and his fury is roused to the highest pitch of which it is capable. Oh, how he longs for the good old days when fathers could whip their recalcitrant daughters and shut them up in a closet with bread and water till they returned to a sense of their duty! He is so angry that, hot as his haste is, he compels himself to take a turn across the common before seeing Mignon, lest he should be guilty of some act of violence towards her. In spite of this precaution, he cannot restrain his rage when he sees her, and heaps the most furious words upon her. Mignon does not answer a syllable: the dogged, sullen look that is the most dangerous expression of her temper comes into her fair face at the outset, and deepens as he goes on.

When Captain Carlyle has poured all the vials of his wrath, she leaves him, and goes to her room thirsting for and determined on revenge. When Sir Tristram comes to see her, she never answers by a word to the knockings of mother and sisters, who dare not rap too loudly lest he should hear them and surmise the state of affairs. Fortunately, he is *en route* for London, and cannot stay very long on account of losing the train. Captain Carlyle accompanies him. In the afternoon Miss Mignon sallies forth, meets Oswald (her father has forbidden her ever to speak to him again), and tells him that she is ready to fly with him. She will pretend illness next day; he is to have a carriage waiting on the common; she will join him shortly before nine, in time to catch the train for London. She is to go to the house of Oswald's old nurse, who is married to a butcher in the Borough, and who would do "anything in the world" for him, he tells Mignon.

Oswald leaves her with winged heels to make his arrangements, and Mignon goes back to the bosom of her family, hugging delightedly to her breast the thought of the dire revenge she is about to inflict on every member of it. When Sir Tristram and Captain Carlyle return from town, she is in the most charming humor in the world: the former is persuaded that his fears were unfounded, the latter congratulates himself upon his "firmness" in the morning.

CHAPTER IX.

"'I know not,' said the Princess, 'whether marriage be more than one of the innumerable modes of human misery. I am sometimes disposed to think with the severer casuists of most nations, that marriage is rather permitted than approved, and that none, but by the instigation of a passion too much indulged, entangle themselves with indissoluble compacts.'" *Rasselas.*

THE day following, when Sir Tristram comes to pay his usual visit, he brings Mignon a collar of pearls with a diamond clasp, a magnificent diamond pendant, and ear-rings to match. He also brings her a basket of peaches and a lovely box of French bonbons. Mignon begins to think it would be rather a shame to spoil Gerry's prospects. Sir Tristram has, besides, a proposal to make to her. How would she like to go abroad after their marriage and on by easy stages to Italy? He has had foreign travel enough to last him his life, but, ever thoughtful for Mignon, he reflects that it might be a disadvantage to her to appear in the world never having been anywhere or seen anything. This proposal charms the young lady. She decides that every sacrifice must be made for Gerry at whatever cost to herself. So, whilst poor Oswald is waiting in an agony of impatience on the common, counting the moments, until, to his despair, he finds it is too late under any circumstance to catch the last train, Mignon is calmly coquetting with Sir Tristram in the garden by moonlight, and he, charmed with her new-born graciousness, is more infatuated than ever.

Mignon is rather sorry for Oswald, but she could not very well warn him of her change of mind without betraying herself. He, poor lad, is the prey to a thousand wild fancies, firmly believes that their plot has been discovered and she perhaps put in durance vile. At last he sends the fly away in despair, and creeps towards the house to try to find out what is going on within. As he draws near, he hears the sound of Mignon's ringing laugh: a moment later he catches sight of her lovely face upturned in the moonlight to Sir Tristram, who

is regarding her with all the rapture of a favored lover. A stony feeling creeps over Oswald, as though, instead of looking on that golden head, he was gazing on the Medusa's writhing snakes. He creeps away out of sight and hearing, and then flings himself wildly on the common and gives vent to his passion of rage and despair. When he takes his way homeward, he is a sadder and a wiser man. Never again, he swears, will he see that fair, false face. Nor does he; and Mignon is thus saved from a great deal of embarrassment. Against her father she is bitterly enraged. He cannot win a word or look from her save absolutely necessary Yeas and Nays, though he tries his hardest to conciliate her. It will be very unpleasant, he reflects, if as Lady Bergholt she should turn against him and carry her husband with her. Besides, she is really his favorite child; and he feels remorse for his outburst, which he no longer congratulates himself upon as "judicious firmness."

The days wear on apace, and Mignon alternates between self-gratulation and angry regret. The nearer her wedding-day looms, the more unsatisfactory it seems to her, the more of a martyr is she pleased to consider herself,—something between Iphigenia and Jephthah's daughter.

In spite of the evidence of jewel-cases and gorgeous apparel, she persists in ignoring any advantage to herself: she is the victim of her father's rashness and Gerry's ambition. By her wayward and fractious behaviour she drives her family to the verge of despair; they long with ardor for the wedding-day, after which Sir Tristram will have to bear the brunt of her humors. He, luckily for himself, is called to his Northern property on important business, and sees very little of her during the ten days that immediately precede the "event." He has been considerably exercised in his mind on the subject of a best man: he knows it is no use asking Fred, who has an utter horror of weddings; every one of his intimate friends is away shooting or abroad. What is to be done? He meets Raymond L'Estrange one day passing through town, and asks the favor somewhat diffidently of him. Raymond accepts the office.

At last the day arrives, the day impatiently looked for by every one but Mignon. It is a windy, showery day, with fitful gleams of sunshine, not the sort of day one would choose

for a wedding. Sir Tristram is too happy to care about the weather, Mignon too miserable. She is within an ace of saying "No" at the altar, but refrains, and issues from the church-door, Lady Bergholt. The first gleam of satisfaction she feels is when she hears herself called "My lady."

Raymond has not been able to get a good glimpse of her yet: her costly lace veil somewhat conceals her face, which is perhaps well, since its expression might startle some of the bystanders. He can only see that she has ruddy, golden hair and an exquisite figure. But when her veil is removed, he absolutely draws in his breath. Never in his life, he thinks, has he seen anything so perfectly lovely as Lady Bergholt. "I congratulate you, Sir Tristram; you *are* fortunate," he whispers, heartily, almost enviously, and the happy bridegroom smiles radiantly. At this moment he would not change places with any created human being; three hours later I think he would have considered himself the gainer by exchange with a crossing-sweep or a galley-slave.

They are at breakfast. Raymond can scarcely take his eyes from the bride. He is wishing devoutly that he had met her before Sir Tristram, and the bride steals many a furtive glance at him, and thinks she has never seen a man half so handsome. She is thinking, too, with intense bitterness, "If I had not tied myself to this old man, I might have married one who was young and handsome and rich too."

The carriage is waiting to convey the happy pair to a station eight miles distant. It is drawn by four bays, and was to have been open, but a shower is apprehended. Mignon comes down, looking lovely in her charming toilette, but white as her own lace. She does not smile, nor evince emotion of any kind. Her own family are painfully conscious that there is something strange about her. If so lovely a face could look vindictive, one might say that was the expression of it. Raymond says to himself, "By Jove! she does not like him. What a shame!"

Lady Bergholt permits her mother and sisters to embrace her, though she holds herself as rigid as an icicle; she kisses Gerry, the only one whom she thus favors; from her father she turns deliberately away, and he busies himself about the carriage, afraid to seem conscious of her behavior. Sir Tristram does not see this little episode; he helps his wife

into the carriage, jumps in after her, and the four handsome bays start with a flourish. At the last moment, the old slippers that have been carefully prepared for the occasion are forgotten.

Sir Tristram feels the happiest man in the world. During his engagement he has sometimes had nervous fears that something would step between him and Mignon, and that he would never know the intense bliss of calling her wife. All fear and doubt have vanished now: this exquisite being is his very own. In the fulness of his heart, he turns and clasps her in his arms.

"Don't touch me!" she almost shrieks, disengaging herself violently from his embrace. "*I hate you!*" And with that she falls to bitter weeping.

Sir Tristram's arms fall nerveless by his side: an awful horror seizes him. And yet she cannot mean it: her nerves are unstrung; that is all.

"You know it!" she gasps, between her sobs, all her pent-up rage and misery breaking forth; "you knew it all along! but you *would* marry me."

Sir Tristram puts his hand to his head.

"Oh, God! what have I done!" he mutters.

"I wish I was dead!" sobs Mignon.

"Child," he cries, hoarsely, "have some human pity upon me! If I had known this only this morning, I would rather have put a bullet through my heart than marry you."

"You *did* know it!" she retorts. "I told you at first, in the message I sent you by papa."

"What message?"

"He promised me on his honor to tell you what I said."

"And what was that?"

"That I did not care for you, and never should; that I only accepted you for Gerry's sake; and that if you liked to take me on those terms, you could."

In his heart, Sir Tristram curses Captain Carlyle. If he had only told him the truth! The future stands a yawning gulf before him,—an awful abyss, into which he has not only plunged himself but this unhappy girl.

"As God is my witness," he murmurs, brokenly, "he never told me this. I believed, at all events, that if you did not love me now I could make you in time."

"Make me!" she echoes, scornfully. "How could you, when you are more than old enough to be my father?"

This is the revenge Mignon has promised herself: it is the thought of telling him these bitter truths that has buoyed her up. It is not in her hard little soul to fathom the agony she is inflicting on this noble heart: bitter words only make *her* angry, and *she* can retaliate. Nothing any living being could say could wound her a thousandth part as she is wounding the unhappy man beside her.

What shall he do? he wonders, in speechless pain. Shall he stop the carriage and take her back home again, or shall he go on to Dover, whither they are bound, telegraph to her father, and, leaving her in possession of his title and wealth, fly the country forever? He is a proud man; he shrinks from public exposure, above all from ridicule. He leans back in the carriage like one stunned, feeling as if some awful disgrace had befallen him, or rather as if he had brought it upon himself. He ought to have known. Had he not had warnings? When Mignon treated him with caprice and disdain, why had he not attributed it to its right source? why had he been fool enough to take her father's word for her liking?

Mignon, having vented her spleen, feels better. She dries her eyes, and lets down the window that the wind may cool her hot cheeks, bethinking herself that she does not want people to see she has been crying. She is not at all sorry nor ashamed of her outburst, but rather congratulates herself upon having had the Spartan fortitude to carry out her vindictive intention. Then, quite oblivious of the man she has stricken with such bitter agony, she falls to thinking about Oswald and wondering if he is feeling very bad about her marriage; then the handsome Mr. l'Estrange occupies her thoughts, and is in his turn ousted by her new maid, whom she thinks an awful nuisance. By the time she reaches the station, she has quite recovered her serenity; but Sir Tristram, as he hands her out, is ashy pale and looks like a man who has seen some awful vision. The valet and the maid remark it; so do the post-boys. Mignon does not condescend to glance at him until he is seated opposite to her in the train.

"How old he looks!" she says to herself,—"older even than I thought before."

CHAPTER X.

"Yes! to lie beneath a walnut-tree or cedar in a garden
Quaint, old-fashioned, shut away from all the murmurs of the crowd,
Of whose gate some sculptured figure, Love or Time, should be the warden,
And where only voice of singing birds should dare to breathe aloud."
Violet Fane.

Mrs. Stratheden always leaves London for her country-seat the first week in July. Her instincts are gregarious, she is fond of society, could hardly indeed (so her friends say) live long without it, but she is passionately fond of the country. "One could not appreciate it thoroughly," she says, smiling, "if one were not able to contrast it with the din and bustle and weariness of cities. I should not know the delight of coming back if I never left it." So, the first convenient day in July, she, Mrs. Forsyth, her friend (she never calls her by the hireling name of "companion"), and the greater part of her establishment, take leave of May Fair and speed homewards by the Great Northern express to The Manor House. There, for a fortnight, Olga takes what she calls her holiday. Not a guest does she bid, not a visit does she pay, but roams about her grounds the live-long day, plucks gorgeous or tender-colored roses, seeks crimson strawberries amidst their green nest of leaves and gathers them with dainty fingers, paces to and fro under the big firs whence the sun draws a keen strong fragrance, over a velvety green moss so luxuriously soft, so delicately shaded, that no carpet from Eastern looms could hope to vie with it. Or perhaps she lies indolently among the cushions of her boat on the lakelet, and lets the clear cool water trickle through her fingers, or swings gently to and fro in her hammock between the trees on the tiny island.

"A hammock," writes Edward Delaney to John Flemming in that charming story "Marjorie Daw," "is very becoming when one is eighteen, and has gold hair, dark eyes, and a blue illusion dress looped up after the fashion of a Dresden china

shepherdess, and is *chaussée* like a belle of the time of Louis Quatorze." It is some time since Olga Stratheden was eighteen, and her hair is not gold but dark, yet I take the liberty to doubt whether many girls of eighteen could match her grace or her chaussures as she "sways like a pond-lily in the golden afternoon," to quote Delaney again. Olga has the most beautifully shaped head in the world; its poise is perfect. Her hands have been modelled many a time; so might her feet have been, had she permitted it. Had Olga lived in the days of powder and patches, she would have been a beauty: it was often said to her, "You should have been a French marquise in the last century." She had assumed the dress more than once at a fancy dress ball, and had felt herself very near possessing the gift she had longed for most of all. Why did she long for it? Most women desire beauty because it begets love. But Olga has been loved more than many a beautiful woman.

This is her story.

Some years ago, the Bishop of Lawn was summoned to the bedside of a dying man. To console him with the last rites of the Church? to steady his trembling feet on the brink of the dark waters? to soothe the pangs of a young spirit snatched from life, love, all the world deems fair? No, none of these. He has been sent for to marry him. Olga is the bride; the dying man is her first-cousin, George Stratheden, of whose life she has been the sole love. Of those present there is but one whose eyes are dry, whose voice is firm: it is the bridegroom. He is content, nay, glad, for at this price only he knows could he ever have attained the dearest wish of his life.

When the ceremony is over, a smile comes into his fair young face, a smile such as a bridegroom might wear who had Life and Love, not the cold arms of the King of Terrors, awaiting him, and, lifting his blue eyes, he whispers,—

"Kiss me, darling wife."

Olga, heart-broken, flings herself down beside him; it is too much for her tense nerves; she swoons.

One more retrospect.

Mr. Stratheden and Captain Sefton married two sisters, daughters of a poor baronet. Mr. Stratheden was rich and middle-aged, Captain Sefton young, handsome, not overburdened with means. Each sister was content with, and happy

in, her choice. Mrs. Stratheden was a woman of simple tastes: the country life it pleased her husband, a thorough sportsman, to lead, suited her admirably. She had only one object in life, to make him happy; this object divided itself into two equal halves when her son and only child was born.

Mrs. Sefton was devoted to society. She and her husband lived in a vortex of gayety: neither was happy without it. To them also was born one child, Olga, christened after a Russian princess, an intimate friend of Mrs. Sefton's, who volunteered to be her godmother. Some costly toys, various bonbon-bŏxes, and a pair of diamond ear-rings bequeathed in her will, testified to her discharge of the duties of sponsorship. Olga never remembered to have seen her handsome, autocratic godmother; she had been vexed as a child by the strangeness of her name, on which other children made disparaging comment, but as she grew up she came to like it, and what had before given her a distaste for it, its singularity, became its charm. Olga was fond of her mother, but she adored her father: so that when Mrs. Sefton died, still quite young, the child could sob herself to sleep on her father's breast, and wake, feeling that what she loved best was still left to her. Captain, Colonel Sefton now, devoted as he was to his little daughter, began to discover the inconvenience of being left alone in the world with a young lady who required to be educated, particularly as he had a rooted aversion for schools. Olga, though she had a sweet disposition, was proud and intensely sensitive. Colonel Sefton understood her character, and saw perfectly that what Olga was to develop into as a woman depended almost entirely upon the person or persons who influenced her young years. Ah! those young years, that are like the tendrils of the vine when they begin to climb and twine, ready to grow either to the stout wall and live at peace and shelter there, or to creep round rotten sticks and worm-eaten lattice-work, to be blown away and torn and ruined when the wild winds beat about them. Ah, parents! take care you give your children the stout wall to cling to, not the crumbled wood-work! For Olga's sake, then, Colonel Sefton desired to find a woman gentle, firm, pleasant-mannered, lady-like, above all things *sympathique* (I think that word expresses the meaning better than sympathetic), and who should possess a certain amount of youth and comeliness. He had a theory about good looks,

particularly in the opposite sex: he did not believe in a woman unless she looked good, or, rather, was good to look at. But when he set himself to the task of selecting this *rara avis*, and tried to enlist the help of his fair friends, they one and all, even the most charming and the most reasonable, arched their eyebrows, drew down their mouths, and smiled or frowned as the case might be, but gave as their ultimatum that it was not to be done. If only now he would not insist upon the governess being young and good-looking! But on that subject Colonel Sefton was as firm as his fair counsellors were obstinate (I believe I have given the *correct(?)* adjectives to the sexes).

"My dear Colonel Sefton, if you have a young governess, you must not live in the same house, or you must have an elderly person as chaperon." This is what one lady tells him. "But you know," says another, delicately, "though you may have the very best intentions,—*I am quite sure* you have,—the world *will* talk." "The end of it will be, Charlie," cries the third and most intimate, "you will marry the horrid creature; and a great deal of good that will do Olga."

Colonel Sefton is thoroughly perplexed. At last Mrs. Stratheden cuts the Gordian knot for him: she is a kind, good woman, always more ready with help and comfort than advice.

"Let Olga come to us," she says. "Choose your own governess: we have plenty of room for her; she need not inconvenience us in any way; and as often as you like to see the child, come to us, or she shall go to you. It will be good for Georgie and us too. We are two very quiet stupid people, and want brightening up." After taking much time to reflect, and considering every *pro* and *con*, Colonel Sefton accepted the kind offer, and there was not one of the parties interested who had not thorough cause for self-gratulation on his decision.

Olga was not told at first: she went, as supposed, on a visit to The Manor House with her father; but before a fortnight was over, she was so devoted to every member of the family, to every dog, cat, horse, and bird about the place, that the mere hint of leaving, artfully thrown out one day, sent her into such a torrent of sobs and tears that Colonel Sefton and Mrs. Stratheden could scarcely forbear exchanging a smile (rather a sad one on the father's part) at the success of their

stratagem. But it had not entered into Olga's mind that it was a question of deciding between her father and her new friends. When she realized that, she did not hesitate for a moment. Ultimately, however, when Colonel Sefton promised to come very often to see her, and assured her that she would in reality see more of him if she stayed at The Manor House than if she lived with him in town, Olga was persuaded, and from that day to the present it has been her home.

After two or three failures, Colonel Sefton at last found the ideal governess in Mrs. Forsyth, the widow of a naval officer. She was scarcely more than a girl, but possessed all the attributes that Olga's father considered most important. Besides these, she had immense tact, the desire to please and by pleasing to secure her own future. She soon gained unbounded influence over the child, and used it faithfully and conscientiously. Her maxims, it is true, savored rather more of worldly wisdom than Christian precept: it was to Mrs. Forsyth indisputably Olga owed that gracious tact and *savoir-plaire* Fred Conyngham admired so much.

At eighteen Olga was the most gracious, sweet-mannered, distinguished-looking girl possible to imagine. Her father and aunt adored her: as for poor George, her cousin, just coming of age, he had always been her most devoted slave. Mr. Stratheden had been dead four years, leaving his son a very handsome unentailed property. Olga loved her cousin very sincerely as a cousin, but refused to think of making the tie stronger between them. Poor George would not be satisfied with her cousinly affection, and fumed and fretted himself nearly into a fever. His mother pleaded his cause; Olga turned a deaf ear. Mrs. Forsyth was entreated to use her influence, but declined, and thereby increased her power over the girl fourfold. There was no persecution used: next to her son, Mrs. Stratheden loved Olga: she wanted both to be happy. Just before her eighteenth birthday, Olga wrote to her father:

"My dearest Papa,—Have you forgotten that I am nearly eighteen? When am I 'coming out'? Mary and Alice Vane are going to be presented this season. I think, for more reasons than one, that it would be good for me to leave home for a little while, although I am as happy as the day is long and shall miss them all dreadfully."

On receipt of this letter, Colonel Sefton went at once to his sister Lady Wyvenhoe, who agreed to present Olga and to take charge of her for the season.

May comes, the fairest month of the year, lavish of sweet scents and sounds and tender coloring; but what are the charms of nature to the charms of art? How can the lilies and pansies, the primroses and the blue hyacinths, the pink hawthorn and the golden showers of laburnum, vie with the *guirlandes* on a court train? what worth have the dew-drops spangling the green hedge-rows by the side of the imperishable dew-drops flashing on proud heads and white (or, it may be, mahogany-colored) bosoms? what are the strains of the nightingale, blackbird, and thrush, and the soft wooing of ring-doves to the Italian Opera or Signor Squagliatowski's matinée? what all the lovely variety of spring foliage to the two rows of trees in Rotten Row which as yet give but sparse shelter from the sun's ardent rays? what the glorious floods of silver moonlight in the country to the thousand wax candles at Lady G.'s reception? What, indeed?

Olga feels stifled at first, after the boundless breathing-space she has been used to in the country; but it is not long ere the subtle power of art begins to exercise its fascinations over her. Her débût is most successful: Lady Wyvenhoe, a very good judge, is perfectly satisfied with the impression her niece creates. People do not say Miss Sefton is lovely, but they call her charming (than which, if sincerely meant, few words can be more flattering), elegant, *distinguée*, thorough-bred. And men add, when appealed to, "Quite good-looking enough for anything!"

In the vortex amidst which she is plunged, Olga has yet time to lose her heart,—poor Olga! Among the men who come frequently to Lady Wyvenhoe's house, who surround her niece when she appears in the world, is the Honorable Oliver Beauregard. He is no longer a young man, nor does he affect youthful airs. "I have lived a long time in the world," is a saying frequently on his lips to women, uttered with a charming tenderness of manner. Just before Olga met him, he had taken the enormous leap that separates a youngish man from a middle-aged or oldish one,—had passed from thirty-nine to forty. He had given the best years of his life to the study of women: by this time he knew—or thought

he knew—them by heart, at every age, in every rank, condition, and phase. "Far more interesting study than fossil remains, the antiquity of man, the missing link, or any of Nature's *other* vagaries," he had been heard to say. Not that he was in the least given to swagger about his knowledge; nor was he ever known to speak of a woman individually except in a merely commonplace manner. "A man who has anything to talk about never talks," was one of his chief maxims, although he forbore to enunciate it. Women were often curious to see him and to make his acquaintance. They were invariably disappointed at first. "Really?" (with a slight raising of the brows) "*that* the dangerous Captain Beauregard? there is nothing in the least Juanesque in his appearance!"

On the contrary, he is a very quiet, gentlemanlike-looking man, without the slightest approximation to the languishing, fascinating airs commonly supposed to be inseparable from a Lovelace. He is not even handsome, but has a good figure, a low-toned voice, and wonderfully expressive eyes. With these gifts he has contrived before Olga meets him to make more havoc in the susceptible breasts of the fair than any acknowledged "beauty man" of the age.

Captain Beauregard admires Olga: he looks upon her with more respect than he is wont in his heart to accord her sex. Outwardly no man could appear to feel a more reverential devotion for women: it is one of his great weapons. A man who affects to make light of women, to sneer at them, to speak coarsely to and of them, damages himself unspeakably in their eyes. They may tolerate him, may laugh at and with him, but in their hearts they dislike or despise him.

Oliver Beauregard saw at a glance that Olga respected herself, first and most important step towards gaining the respect of others. She was full of laughter, of brightness, of gay wit, but there was a pureness and dignity about her which forbade any one to be coarse in her presence. And then society had not arrived at the state where it is to-day, when a man is permitted, if not encouraged, to be gross in the *best* society, and may tell with impunity in Belgravia and May Fair *bon mots* (*?*) culled a good deal farther north or a very little farther south of those aristocratic localities.

Every one knew that Captain Beauregard had no intention

of marrying. Dowered maidens and wealthy widows had flung themselves at his head, ready and willing to worship him with their bodies and endow him with all their worldly goods; but he did not permit the sacrifice: he had enough to live upon like a gentleman; all the best houses in the kingdom were open to him,—all but a few which he had closed forever upon himself. When he paid such devotion to Miss Sefton, no one made much remark about it: it was Beauregard's way to single out a fresh woman every season: the only thing that was unusual was his wasting so much time on an *ingénue*. Lady Wyvenhoe was rather pleased at his attention to her neice: nothing brought a girl more into notice than Captain Beauregard's approval.

"It is a great compliment to you, my dear," she said to Olga. "He is not a marrying man, but he will draw others. Only be sure not to lose your heart to him."

Olga only replied by a pensive smile. In her own heart she was *quite* sure, as many a woman had been before, that he loved her. It was true he had never told her so, never breathed a word that the wiliest of her sex could have construed into a hint of marriage; but Olga did not look so far ahead as that: her pure, fresh young heart, unbreathed upon by any other love, was his to be had for the asking, nay, given without any asking, amply repaid, she thought, by the preference he *seemed* to give her. But in her heart of hearts, without a shadow of vanity, she believed he loved her as she loved him: those wonderful eyes of his told her so, and she would have staked her life upon their truth. Every one else knew strange stories of ruined hearths and lives laid waste that the wonderful eyes had had their share in, but, somehow, people never told that kind of story in Olga's presence. It was "always the woman's fault," women said. Captain Beauregard had invariably behaved like a gentleman, was ready to give any satisfaction demanded of him, and once, when his adversary had sworn to have his life, had fired in the air. It was impossible to look at him, to witness his quiet, irreproachable demeanor, and to believe he had ever led a woman into error. Absurd! it was her own wilful wickedness. There were some women, however, with stainless reputations, who did not agree to this verdict. Nevertheless they did not think fit to negative it.

What Captain Beauregard felt for Olga it is not easy to de-

cide. That she possessed some charm for him was evident from the time he devoted to her. It may have been her freshness, her purity, her arch gayety, the unmistakable presence of a heart and soul that the touch of his master-hand had called forth; it may have been that she awoke in him the possibility of a nobler and better future, awoke the power to believe what he had disbelieved so utterly till now, that passion may mingle with reverence, and that there is a love which defies satiety.

Olga's ardent nature did battle royal with her pride. She cared for nothing in the wide world but to be near him; she only counted the hours when he was present; her heart beat with triumph when he approached her, her lustrous eyes shone with tenfold fire as she welcomed him; and yet she was fighting with all her might not to show what she felt to the world. From him, believing what she did in her innocent heart, she had no faintest desire of concealment: if there were glory or triumph to him in her poor love, let him drink the cup to the last drop. Olga was passionately fond of dancing, but the most rapture-breathing strains, the most perfectly accomplished partner, could give her no joy like that she felt when she laid her little hand on Oliver Beauregard's arm when the dance was over and he took her away to get cool, or to find her aunt, or whatever the pretext might be. Captain Beauregard did not dance.

Colonel Sefton was in Norway. After the first two or three weeks of attendance upon his daughter, he left her to his sister's care. London seasons had become a weariness to his flesh. Had her father been with her, he would certainly not have permitted her to see so much of Captain Beauregard; but he was innocently fishing the deep pools for big salmon and going placidly to bed by daylight in the Norway summer nights. Lady Wyvenhoe was unsuspicious: she saw that Olga liked to talk to Captain Beauregard, but she also seemed to take pleasure in the society of other men. When Olga refused a very eligible offer of marriage, her ladyship was a little puzzled and vexed: still, the girl was only eighteen; there was plenty of time.

The season came to an end at last. Olga, heavy-hearted, went back to The Manor House.

CHAPTER XI.

"A little sorrow, a little pleasure,
Fate metes us from the dusty measure
That holds the date of all of us;
We are born with travail and strong crying,
And from the birth-day to the dying
The likeness of our life is thus."

SWINBURNE.

DURING her absence, Olga had written frequently to Mrs. Forsyth,— not so voluminously nor so gushingly as the heroine of "Sir Charles Grandison" to her "dearest Lucy," but she had found time to keep her friend *au courant* of her proceedings. Strange to say, she, who had never had a secret, scarce a thought, from Mrs. Forsyth before, had only written of Captain Beauregard in the most casual manner. She was resolved to keep her secret, ignorant of the extreme hardship of the task she was setting herself. Olga, with her impetuous nature, her keen want of sympathy, could not play her part long: her heart was yearning to talk of the dear one, to pronounce his name and to hear it from other lips. It is dull work writing the darling name a thousand times to tear into fragments next moment: whispering it to the birds, the flowers, the rushes, gives scant comfort; day-dreams, when no longer fed by reality, grow tame and flat; memory without certainty of the future waxes easily from joy to pain. On the third day after her return, Olga, sitting on the grass at her friend's feet, with the July sun filtering through the trees upon her ardent, upturned face, made her confession with a beating heart and little trembling fingers that plucked nervously at her gown, but eyes radiant, luminous, great with love and hope.

How could she guess that the woman to whom she was making her tender confidences was pitying, not congratulating her, in her heart, though her face smiled sympathy? Mrs. Forsyth thought all men selfish, false, cruel. Her own experience had been unfortunate. The one she had given all

her young heart to, abandoned her for a rich bride; the one she married, and who professed boundless love for her, ill treated her from a month after their marriage until his death three years later. So she disbelieved utterly in men, and would fain, for Olga's sake, have brought her up in her own faith or want of it, but refrained. "It is no use," she told herself: "she is a woman: she must suffer. Some day, when she has lost her first illusions, I will give her the weapons she wants: they would be no use without the experience."

Olga, with radiant eyes and a flush of tender color in her face, is telling her story. With fond hands Mrs. Forsyth caresses the shapely head, with smiling eyes she looks into the bright, triumphant ones upturned to hers, with willing, untired ears she listens to the praises that glorify the girl's idol. Surely no man was ever so noble, so altogether worthy a woman's love, before! Mrs. Forsyth listens with a face that expresses only sympathy, but in her heart there lurks a grave mistrust. *She* sees in Captain Beauregard, even from the girl's innocent, enthusiastic description, not the true knight, the Launcelot of Olga's dreams,—only a man sated, world-worn, in search of a fresh emotion and regardless at what cost to this poor child he gratifies it. But it is too late to warn her now: let her taste the only bliss she is likely ever to extract from it, the delight of dreaming and talking of her love.

And so Olga enjoyed a short sweet trance of bliss. But, as the days crept on, nor talking nor dreaming could satisfy the hunger of her heart: she had a wild longing to see him again, to hear the caressing tones of his voice, to meet the gaze of his love-speaking eyes. She wondered painfully if he had not the same desire, if his life too did not lack something away from her; not as hers did,—no! young as she was, she felt love could not be the all-absorbing thing to a man it is to a woman; but still, if he loved her as she believed he did, he would feel a yearning for the sight of her, and then he would come to her. She remembered how it had pained her at the time that he had not said anything definite about seeing her again; he had asked if she were going to Scotland, and expressed himself disappointed when she answered in the negative. She began to grow pale and hollow-eyed, to have passionate fits of crying, to lie awake at night, to be filled with a wild desire to see him, even to go to him.

Mrs. Forsyth saw it all, longed to help her, but knew not how. Six weeks had passed away since her return: August was waning. One day Mrs. Forsyth, reading the county paper, came upon the following paragraph:

"Esclandre in high life. Considerable excitement has been created in the highest circles by the elopement of Lady C. N——d with Captain the Hon. O——r B——r——d. It appears both were on a visit at S—— Castle, where a large party had assembled for grouse-shooting. Some words passed between Lady C. and her husband with regard to Captain B.'s attentions, and the next day both the lady and her lover were missing. It is believed that their destination is the Continent. There are various rumors afloat concerning the action decided upon by the injured husband: some assert that he started immediately in pursuit of the fugitives, bent on chastising the seducer, others say that he will await his revenge at the hands of Sir Creswell Creswell."

Mrs. Forsyth put down the paper and reflected. She was not surprised, hardly sorry, but she could not bear the thought of Olga's suffering. How, with her impetuous passionate nature, she *would* suffer! what an awful wrench it must be to tear all the love and faith and trust out of such a heart as hers!

A long time elapses. Olga comes in. Mrs. Stratheden and her cousin are out driving.

"Ma chère," says the girl (she always calls her thus), "how melancholy you look! What is the matter?"

"Come here, darling." And Olga sits down at her friend's feet.

Mrs. Forsyth lays her hand caressingly on the shining hair, and looks at her with troubled eyes.

"Olga, do you know why women were sent into the world?"

"To love and be loved," Olga answers, with smiling eyes. The second post has just brought her a letter from Lady Wyvenhoe, in which she mentions having heard from Captain Beauregard, who had asked after her niece and hoped she had not quite forgotten him.

"No," Mrs. Forsyth answers. "To love and to be repaid by cruelty, by treachery, by falsehood; to be made a tool of, a vehicle for men's amusement, and then to be dropped for a newer toy."

"Ma chère," cries Olga, lifting eyes that have both pain and wonder in them, to her friend's face, "what do you mean?"

"My poor little darling!" whispers Mrs. Forsyth, and puts both her arms round the girl, as if she could shelter her by her embrace from the woes of the soul as she might from the dangers of the body.

A look of terror comes into Olga's face and blanches it: she looks as though she had seen some ghastly sight. Her heart beats so loud, she can hear it.

"Tell me, oh, tell me quick!" she gasps.

Mrs. Forsyth gives her the paper and shuts her eyes: she does not want to witness the slaying of trust and faith in the child's heart.

Olga reads, re-reads, and reads again. A dull, dazed feeling has come across her after the first shock.

"Ma chère," she says, in a low, quiet voice, leaning her cheek on her hand and looking up with unfaltering eyes, "why did you not tell me before?"

"Tell you what, my darling?"

"All the while that I have been talking such nonsense to you about him, why did you not tell me that he was laughing at me and amusing himself? I wonder" (breaking off) "if *she* is very lovely. How she must have loved him to give up everything for him!" And then she rises and goes towards the door, taking the paper with her.

"Where are you going, darling?"

"I am going to my own room. Don't come to me yet. I want to think." Then, with a wan smile as she sees her friend's grieved face, "You see I take it very well, do I not? I shall soon get over it."

And she goes,—goes and hides herself in her chamber, and cries out her passionate farewell to love and hope, and wonders, as the young do, how the sun can shine, and the birds sing, and life go on just the same as if her heart were not broken.

And Mrs. Forsyth, knowing what is best for her, leaves her to fight out her long agony, and makes excuse for her absence, and then at sundown goes to her.

"It is I, dearest: let me in!" And Olga unbars the door. Her eyes are dim and heavy with long weeping; her hands are nerveless; she is all unstrung.

Mrs. Forsyth unbinds her hair, bathes her aching head,

makes her eat and drink, puts her to bed, and stays with her until, worn out, she falls asleep. All night through Olga sleeps the sound sleep of youth.

Who has not known the awful misery of waking to the memory of some great grief?—the first dim consciousness of something wrong, the gradual dawning remembrance, until the hideous shape stands revealed in all its horror.

The days go by somehow. Autumn comes, and changes the green of summer to gold and bronze, to crimson and russet. It gladdens the hearts of the sportsmen, and rings the death-knell of hundreds of thousands of little plump soft-breasted birds which in dying, it is to be supposed, fulfil the purpose of their being. Autumn, with its fair hot noons and early twilights, its picturesque, harmonious-colored decay, its gaudy scentless flowers, its ruddy golden sunsets, thick dews, and chilly nights. Winter follows.

"The horn of the hunter is heard on the hill,"

or more probably in the vale; the scarlet coats come out, and the glossy hunters, like giants refreshed after their long summer of idleness, are keen and full of life: the hounds are thirsting for Reynard's blood. Let him garner up his store of cunning: he will want it, poor beast! Sport, always sport! something must be torn and maimed, must suffer and die, to appease the lust of blood in man's heart. It is the old savage instinct of the race, that finds comparatively harmless vent in the slaughter of small defenceless things nowadays. But it is a glorious thing to be a sportsman!—it is for women to be tender-hearted: would to heaven they all were!

Winter! leaves falling or fallen everywhere; the coverts are clearing of their tangle of wild flowers and fern and grasses; it is all one brown, sodden, undistinguishable mass now, and will no longer hide the gorgeous pheasants or the frightened little rabbits. The frost has stripped the leaves from the red berries in the hedges; the sun is so far off he can scarce be felt; the warmth is within now, and the women read or work and wax confidential over the crackling logs; it is getting too cold to go out with the shooters' lunch, and there is more hunting than shooting now. They drive to the meet sometimes, but it is not very satisfactory: men are thinking a good deal more of the day's business than of daintily be-wrapped

and be-furred fair ones, and are devoutly wishing those who have elected to go *en Amazone* and hint at following, out of the way.

George Stratheden is a mighty hunter, and, unlike most men, is always wanting the object of his affections to do likewise. Olga is a fearless and most graceful rider, but she never goes a-hunting,—thinks it unfeminine. She generally rides to the meet and returns with her groom as soon as they find.

Poor George is more deeply in love than ever, and, now that in her wrath against his sex she has dropped the old cousinly affectionate manner towards him and treats him with something of scorn and impatience, his love takes new fire from her disdain. She is callous to his sufferings: she has adopted Mrs. Forsyth's theory. When a man wants a woman, she is his tyrant; when he has her, she is his slave. It is better to be tyrant than slave. Mrs. Forsyth no longer refrains from indoctrinating Olga with her own opinions, and Olga is hardening her heart against men as though they were the natural enemies of her sex.

So poor George wooes and prays and pleads in vain: Olga tells him frankly she will never be his wife, *never*. He vows she shall, and in the end he has his way. This is how it comes to pass. One day he goes out hunting, strong and fair and stalwart, and four hours later he is brought home with a broken back, and three, four days', or it may be at most a week's, life left in him. One half of him is alive; he is perfectly sensible, can speak and move his hands, his head, his arms; the other half is dead as marble, as clay. He insists on knowing the truth: so they tell him. He bears it bravely. A slight quiver of the lips, a momentary dimness of his blue eyes, are the only signs he gives of weakness. And yet to be cut off in the heyday of his youth and strength, with all that makes life worth having, before him, to go out alone into the dark cruel night of death and leave behind those things that seem even fairer and dearer now he must say good-by to them forever! He only expresses two wishes. He would be buried in his red coat, and he would have Olga marry him.

"Mother!" he says in the night, as she is sitting heart-broken by his bedside, "I could die happy if Olga would be my wife. It is not only a whim, dear. You know Uncle Charles is not very well off: we have no near relation we care

for, and your tastes are very simple: you have this house for your life, and more income than you spend. I should like to leave all I have that you do not want or care for to Olga; and if she were my wife it would not seem strange, but would be hers of right."

What could he have asked his mother, living, that she would not have granted? dying—how much more!

Colonel Sefton, who has been telegraphed for, gives his consent. Olga is not told a word about the money: they guess rightly that such knowledge would be the greatest barrier to her granting his wish. She is broken-hearted: now that it is too late, she, like the rest of us, would sacrifice anything, everything, to save him.

And so the special license is procured, and the bishop bidden, and the poor dying lad joyfully takes his grief-stricken bride for the short time that remains until death them do part. Sure no sadder wedding was ever celebrated on God's earth than this one!—the poor mother weeping piteously in Mrs. Forsyth's arms, who herself is quivering with sobs and using the strongest effort of her will to be calm; Olga with rivers of tears raining from her eyes, and her hands pressed convulsively against her breast to check its agonized heaving; Colonel Sefton biting his lips hard as he holds his daughter with one hand and brushes away the tears that will rise with the other; even the bishop with dim eyes and tremulous voice and a strange, unwonted thickness in the voice that is celebrated for its clearness.

"Little wife! darling wife!" the word is scarcely ever off the poor lad's dying lips: its utterance seems to give him infinite pleasure. He will have her sign her new name, Olga Stratheden, and show to him; he bids those about him address her as Mrs. Stratheden, and has even heart to make a little joke and tell his mother she is the dowager now; and the poor mother smiles, the wannest, sorrowfulest smile that ever hovered on a woman's lips. The last words he utters are, "Good-night, little darling wife."

They say people don't die of broken hearts. Mrs. Stratheden died four months after her son. The doctors could not tell what she died of: she ought to have lived to a hundred, they said. With the exception of a few legacies, she also left everything to her niece. Olga, a young girl of nineteen,

was a rich widow about whom every one was talking. But she loathed her riches, and was inconsolable for her aunt and cousin, nay, her husband,—strange thought! At last Colonel Sefton insisted on taking her abroad for change of scene, Mrs. Forsyth of course accompanying them. Everywhere, the young girl, travelling in widow's weeds, excited curiosity and attention. This was odious to Olga: it seemed a mockery, besides; but custom exacted it.

They travelled for a year, by the end of which time Olga had recovered her health and spirits and had begun to find it pleasant to be rich and considered. She went into society. Her godmother's daughter, married to a Russian prince of distinction, took her by the hand, and she became the fashion in Paris. There she acquired the art of dress, perfection in the language, and the additional charm of manner which no people possess to a greater degree than high-bred Frenchwomen. Wherever she went, she excited interest and curiosity: her really strange story was made ten times stranger by repetition: she was reported to be fabulously rich. She had princes, statesmen, soldiers at her feet,—men who loved her for what she had,—men who loved her for what she was. Be it confessed, she treated them with some cruelty: she refused to believe men could suffer from love: if they did, *tant mieux*,—she was probably avenging some other woman.

Captain Beauregard, coming to Paris, having left Lady C. N—— to a dull repentance or a shameful notoriety in some disreputable continental town, heard of Olga's fame. It was not long before they met. Mrs. Stratheden had always been preparing for this contingency, and was able to meet the man who had spoiled her life as a mere casual acquaintance. They met often. Captain Beauregard, piqued by her indifference, which was apparently sincere, used every art he was master of to win back her regard. He was falling desperately in love with her,—he who had never allowed a woman to be anything more to him than a momentary passion, a passing caprice. He began to suffer what she had suffered, what many a woman had suffered for his sake.

Olga never gave him any chance of seeing her in private; indeed, she never received any man unless her father or Mrs. Forsyth were present. One afternoon, however, she was alone: the servants believed Colonel Sefton to be with her, but he

had gone out without their perceiving it. At last the opportunity comes that Captain Beauregard has so ardently desired: he has come to call, and is ushered into the room where Olga is alone. If she is not beautiful, nothing can be more gracious or elegant than Mrs. Stratheden: she has something more fascinating than mere beauty; she is only a girl, and yet no woman breathing could have more tact, more self-possession, combined with the most perfect womanliness. Captain Beauregard, who has never in his life dreamed of asking a woman to marry him, feels capable of the stupendous sacrifice as he looks at her. He comes up to her, takes her hands, looks at her with eyes that have all their old fascination and more, since his soul shines through them, and says,—

"Olga, have you forgotten?"

She meets his look with a steadfast gaze. His voice and eyes have still something of their old power over her, but she has not acted over this scene a thousand times to herself for nothing.

There is the least quiver of her lip, the least tremor in her voice, as she answers,—

"No, I have forgotten *nothing*."

"You have heard evil reports of me," he says, hurriedly. "Nay, I do not want to defend myself: you can have heard nothing so bad of me as what I feel myself deserving of at this moment; but give me a chance; let me try to be something better in the future for your sake!"

Oliver Beauregard has never in his life until to-day humbled himself before a woman,—has never even felt conscious of the superiority of one: he has always been the sportsman, they the game to be snared or trapped or carried off by a strong arm. Now he feels himself genuinely the inferior of this slight girl.

"Listen to me," utters Olga, the tears standing in her proud eyes. "I have thought sometimes that such a thing as this might happen one day, and I always meant to say this to you, not in any set words" (putting her hand to her head), "I have forgotten the words, but the sense is this. It seems a light thing to you to destroy women's reputations, women's souls: perhaps" (with a shade of scorn) "you do not believe they have any. Women are fair game for you. Well, perhaps some of them are: I have seen something of the world lately, and know more of its ways than when I met you first. But

is it a light thing, do you think" (passionately), "to take a girl's heart, a heart quite pure and fresh and full of innocent faith, a heart that believes in the man who makes her love him as she believes in heaven, to take it just for sport's sake, and then to fling it away to break or to wither? You have spoiled my life; you have turned my faith into doubt; you have made me read falsehood on the lips that perhaps came to me with truth on them; you have turned the sweet of all my young life to bitter, and made me incapable of tasting the greatest happiness a woman can know."

"Forgive me!" he cries, remorsefully. "Let me atone to you."

He tries to take her hand; but she tears it from him and walks away to the end of the room. When she comes back, she is smiling.

"I have finished my say," she says, quietly. "Let us talk of something else."

"Olga" (passionately), "do not trifle with me. My whole life, I swear, shall be devoted to you. Give me this little hand——"

Olga smiles as she puts it in his.

"Take it in friendship," she says. "Sooner than give it you as you ask it, I would hold it in the fire and let it burn like Cranmer's."

"Are you so unforgiving?" he says, bitterly.

"No," she answers, looking at him with steadfast eyes. "I have forgiven you long ago. Will you do something for my sake?"

"I will."

"You have done much evil in your day," she says, still with her brown eyes fixed on his: "you will do much more before you die. One day think of me, and spare some weak woman's soul for my sake."

Then she turns away and leaves him. In the solitude of her own chamber Olga is crying her heart out. Poor child! she loves him still.

Captain Beauregard does not despair. But a week later, Colonel Sefton has a paralytic seizure, of which he dies in a few months. It is long ere the world sees Olga again.

So much for retrospect. Now we come back to the Olga of to-day, "swaying like a pond-lily in the golden afternoon."

CHAPTER XII.

"Great roses stained still where the first rose bled,
Burning at heart for shame their heart withholds;
And the sad color of strong marigolds,
That have the sun to kiss their lips for love;
The flower that Venus' hair is woven of."

St. Dorothy.

THE Olga of to-day is lying in her hammock, with eyes raised heavenwards, though they cannot see heaven through the green labyrinths of leaves that hide sky and sun, all but a little trickling thread here and there. But in a hammock it is easier to look upward than downward. Now and then, for a change, she glances across the water to the flower rows, where the old-fashioned single roses flourish on their sturdy bushes, crimson, and pink, and pale with ruddy stripes, all-yellow-eyed, gold-colored ones, too, and orange, tiny white ones, and great soft moss roses. Beneath them grow great patches of sky-colored nemophila and mignonette; and there are pansies and campanula, eschscholtzia, sweet-williams, Canterbury-bells, lavender, southernwood, and sweetbrier; for these are not the show-gardens, planted in stiff patterns of vivid color, but the old flower-borders by the water-side that Olga loves for "auld acquaintance' sake." She can see the cups of the white lilies riding on their broad leaves when she looks down, and shining little fish leaping against the sun, and the stately swans sailing down in a royal progress from end to end of the lake; but she looks oftener upwards. Her hands are folded on a book; it is a volume of Alfred de Musset's: she has been reading, not for the first time, that morbidly horrible conception of his that is clothed in such exquisitely pathetic language. Who would think the charming adored Mrs. Stratheden, who has everything heart can desire (so the world says), is also given to indulging in morbid fancies? Ay, the world, the busybody, stupid, short-sighted world, that is so glib to judge, to say what should be, and measures the length and breadth and depth of a heart with its cramped inch-measure of custom and probability.

Olga suffers from the feeling of a *vie manquée*. She asks herself constantly what good she is in the world. Others could answer that question well enough,—could point to her poor, her model cottages, her charities, her universal sympathy for every living being who needs it. Olga's great stumbling-block is the gigantic misery of the whole creation, its sufferings, its sickness, its heartbreakings,—worst and chiefest of all, the agony in its animal life. She carries her sympathy for the dumb part of creation to excess: at least her friends laugh and say so. "Most people who have hobbies," she answers, smiling, "are apt to over-ride them a little. When I die, put over my grave, 'The animal's friend,' the epitaph *I* should be proudest of." Mrs. Stratheden never calls forth the animadversions of the other sex by joining them on shooting-expeditions; she would not see bird or beast shot for all the world (she can even resist the fascinations of Hurlingham); she is not to be converted to the delights of salmon-fishing; she has earned the contempt of fair ones with masculine tastes by utterly refusing to assist at the performance of some favorite terrier in a barn full of rats,—contempt reciprocated fortyfold. If there is one thing in the world that causes Olga to forget her gracious tact, it is cruelty in a woman. "You men," she says, with a *fin sourire*, "have naturally brutal instincts; I suppose the world would not go on, and *we* should not care for you, without; but a cruel woman is nature's most horrid deformity."

"But you," replies her interlocutor, "are yourself very cruel—to men."

"I would rather be the executioner than the victim," she laughs. "With you, one must be one or the other."

Olga believes this firmly. The desire of her life is to love and to be loved, but she has a morbid idea that love cannot be reciprocal. More than once she has been on the point of succumbing to a lover's entreaties, and has done violence to herself to resist them.

"If I married him and grew to love him intensely, as I should do," she tells herself, "I should lose my power over him; and then I should kill myself."

Besides this, Madam Olga is *tant soit peu autocrate:* she has held the reins so long, she is not quite sure whether she could yield them gracefully to any one else now.

"Better perhaps as it is," she decides, with a sigh that

comes from the bottom of her heart; and Mrs. Forsyth fosters this view of the case. She is not more selfish than most people, but very few would care to give up such a position as hers. She has as much benefit and enjoyment out of Olga's possessions as Olga herself; more, since she has no responsibility. She has immense influence over her former pupil, and possesses her sincere and hearty affection; but once let there come a master at The Manor House, and then, instead of honored friend and confidante, she must sink into an unwelcome third. To retire, upon however handsome a pension, would be to lead a life utterly tame and dull after her pleasant luxurious one with Mrs. Stratheden. Mrs. Forsyth would never have been guilty of unfair means to compass an end, but she is not superior to taking advantage of Olga's doubts and fears to retain a position as perfect as one that depends upon another person can possibly be.

Mrs. Forsyth has come at last to a feeling of pleasant security: she has had her anxieties, but, now that Olga has come scathless out of so many temptations to marriage, has refused devotion, rank, good looks, there is not much left to fear.

And yet, if ever a heart ached for want of love and sympathy, it was Olga's; if there breathed a woman (despite her proud exterior) more softly, femininely dependent upon the sterner sex than another, it was Olga; and her heart-hunger, instead of deadening and dying out with time, grew stronger, keener, harder to stifle, as the years rolled by. But of this her friend knew and guessed nothing. Her experience of men had been bitter; she had leaned upon them, and they as reeds had pierced her hand: she never wanted to lean on or trust them again, to hang upon their smiles, to tremble at their frowns.

Olga, having indulged her "sweet and bitter fancies" in the "golden afternoon," and feeling her senses rested by the harmony of sight, sound, and coloring about her, begins to reflect that time is drawing on, and that her horse will soon be at the door. She always rides or drives when the day grows cool. So she rises to a sitting posture, and puts out one dainty foot from her hammock, but gets no farther at present, being beguiled by the scene on which her eyes rest.

"How wonderful nature is!" she thinks, dreamily. "Now, if half a dozen people began to sing different tunes at the

same time, what a horrid discord it would make; but a thousand birds may sing at once, each with a different note, and it is delicious harmony. If you put red, yellow, green, and blue together in art, the combination is hideous; and yet what can be more charming than that patch of nemophila and eschscholtzia growing under those clusters of red roses on their green bushes? What texture did art ever invent comparable to the tissue of the humblest flower? Ah, Nature" (sighing), "the only thing you ever failed in is mankind: when you bestowed life and breath and speech and sight, you gave up your own responsibility."

After this apostrophe to the universal mother, the other little foot comes out of the hammock, and Olga strolls off towards the house. The stable clock strikes five: she has ordered her horse for a quarter-past, so she quickens her steps. Mrs. Stratheden is one of the few punctual women on record. Strange to say, she does not avail herself of her unbounded liberty to keep her horses and servants waiting by the hour, nor does she drive her cook to despair by coming down to dinner when everything has been ready an unspecified time, neither does she exercise that truly feminine prerogative of making the man who adores her wait when he comes to see or to escort her to some place of entertainment: this pet weakness of her sex is not to be scored against Olga.

She has retired to the sacred precincts of her chamber to don her habit, and whilst Mrs. Medly, the high-priestess of that temple, is engaged upon her mysterious rites, we can stroll round and come into the house by the front door, as strangers should do.

When you entered the hall at The Manor House, you felt a strange desire to linger there. It did not seem as though any drawing-room, morning-room, or boudoir could be half so attractive or offer nearly so much to charm the eye. In winter it is the picture of comfort; in summer, deliciously cool and free from glare. One may fancy how the Yule logs crackle and blaze in that vast chimney framed in carved oak, transformed now into a nest of ferns and flowers. In winter the floor, polished like a mirror, is carpeted with rare skins; now its perfection is laid bare, except where a strip of India matting saves the unwary from falling headlong. It is lighted by a window big enough for a church; and, truth to tell, a con-

siderable portion of it stood for centuries in an Italian chapel, casting on the kneeling worshippers rays of a southern sun transmuted into such gorgeous hues as the hand of the craftsman can no longer create to-day. This window is draped by immense curtains of deep-blue velvet. The ceiling ascends to the roof. A flight of broad stairs leads up to the window, then diverges into two flights that land you in the grand old oaken galleries which run round the hall. Everywhere in the hall and staircase where there is a niche or vacant spot stand cabinets, carvings, empanelled pictures, stands of rare china, curious clocks, brackets,—a perfect museum of curiosities. Every object is beautiful in some way, artistic in form or dainty in coloring or workmanship. Olga has rare taste. Nothing recommends itself to her simply because it is old, uncommon, or grotesque, unless it possesses intrinsic beauty as well. She will have no shams, no imitations, if she knows it. Well, she is a rich woman, and can afford to gratify her expensive tastes; but I am very much tempted to think that the feminine love of ornament is so strong in her that if she had been a poor seamstress instead of a *grande dame* she would have decorated her room with a few poor flowers in a cheap vase and any little knickknacks the savings of her toil permitted. Our taste very often hangs upon our power to gratify it.

I said that on entering the hall a stranger felt inclined to linger; but such was the case in every room where you were ushered: each was as perfect in taste, as harmoniously pleasing to the eye and stimulating to the sense of curiosity. There is one room, hall, nay, I know not what to call it, at The Manor House, perfectly unique as far as I know, never having seen or heard of anything similar elsewhere. Olga had it built after her own design, and calls it her "Folly." It opens from the entrance-hall by a small door concealed by a curtain; it is not a conservatory; it is not entirely composed of glass; it is octagonal in shape, has a glass dome, and a great French window in every octagon, to which on the outside there are Venetian shutters. In the centre a fountain plays into a marble basin,—not a little tinkling, irritating, scented toy, but a fountain that throws up a certain volume of water and comes down with a musical splashing sound. Round it are low chairs and couches, some of cane, some brocaded and luxurious, and

the marble floor is laid here and there with Eastern rugs or matting. There are orange-trees and myrtles and rose-trees in great majolica vases; ferns and mosses hang from the roof in baskets and nestle against the marble basin of the fountain; rare creepers hide the trellised walls; there are a few flowers,—only a few, for the predominant color is the cool velvety green of leaves and mosses; and here and there are five of the statues of the world,—the Venus of Medici, of Milo, of Canova, the Apollo Belvedere, and the Perseus of the Vatican. Somewhere hidden behind a screen of leaves, is one of those exquisite self-playing organs. It is not a resort fit alone for hot summer days, though it is most like paradise then, but can be heated to any temperature by invisible hot-water pipes.

"The Folly has been the one extravagance of my life," Olga says, laughing, "and I have never repented it. Nothing soothes me like the sight and sound of water. When I go away, there is nothing I miss so much as my fountain."

I will spare the reader any more "upholstery" for the present, and emerge again from the hall door, where Mrs. Stratheden has sprung this moment to the back of her handsome chestnut. She has a mania for that color, and rarely rides or drives any other. Mrs. Forsyth has come out on the steps as usual to see her off. Olga throws her a smile as she rides away, with the head groom, a triumph of art, behind her. There is never any slackness about Jenkins: if he rode behind his mistress every day in the country for ten years without meeting a soul, his own attire, his bits and bridles, would be as faultless, as unimpeachable, on the last day, as though they were got up for the Row. Certainly the saddle is the place to see Mrs. Stratheden: I am not sure the position does not rival even that of the French marquise. Given a woman with a perfect seat, perfectly mounted, a graceful figure, a small head coiled round with glossy hair, a face piquante and full of expression if not absolutely beautiful, and the result must needs be striking.

Olga rides down the avenue on this quiet afternoon all unprescient how much of fate hangs upon the decision as to whether she shall turn to right or left when she emerges from the park gates. Fate decrees that she shall take the road across the common to Alington. She is riding down a green glade now: her canter has brought the color to her cheeks, an

additional brightness to her eyes: she feels the delicious exhilaration that nothing but riding or dancing can give. At this moment she is conscious of the want of sympathy in her pleasure. It is not far off. In the distance she descries two horsemen coming towards her, and feels a certain curiosity as to who they may be.

"It cannot be Raymond," she thinks: "he never comes home so early as this."

Two minutes solve all doubts. It is Raymond L'Estrange and another young fellow about the same age, unknown to Mrs. Stratheden.

Two manly, good-looking, well-mounted young Englishmen of a certain class present as comely a sight to the eye on a summer evening as it can well desire, especially to a woman's eye. So thinks Olga, who has a genuine weakness for good looks. Not that Mr. L'Estrange's companion can bear comparison with him as far as positive beauty goes. Raymond's every feature is perfect; but the other has that general fresh Saxon comeliness that a dark-haired woman like Olga is sure to esteem highly.

"I'm awfully glad to see you," cries Raymond, shaking her by the hand as he rides up; and his looks do not belie his words. "Let me introduce an old Eton friend to you, Mr. Vyner—Leo, Mrs. Stratheden." Olga does not content herself with a bow, but gives the stranger her hand with the frank grace that so well becomes her; and then the two young men turn their horses' heads and ride one on either side of her.

"How is it you have left town so early this year?" Olga asks of Raymond.

"I don't know. I got bored with the heat and the noise and the constant whirl, and longed for the country, and Leo, who hates London, promised to come with me; but now that we are here and there is nothing to do,—no shooting, no fishing,—we are at our wits' end to kill time, and have some idea of going to Brittany, or Jersey, or Ems, or somewhere, for a change. I didn't dare disturb your solitude, though I have been longing to, and there's nobody else back yet but the Foxes, and it's no fun going there now Kitty's engaged."

"Then it is really settled!"

"Settled! oh, yes, irrevocably. Fancy that mercenary little

wretch taking a dull pompous ass like Clover just for the sake of being 'My lady,'—a baronet whose father was a mechanic," adds Raymond, with the conscious disdain of a man able to count several generations of ancestors who never soiled their hands with despicable toil nor were of the least benefit to their kind.

"Poor little Kitty! I hope she will be happy," remarks Mrs. Stratheden, thoughtfully.

"Oh, she'll be happy enough as long as she can get his money to spend. She hasn't an atom of heart," says Raymond, who has a slight grudge against Kitty for the flippant way in which she has treated his attentions. Not that he had ever thought seriously of marrying her, but little Kitty was pretty, and it was pleasant to spoon her when there was nothing else to do, as at the present moment. He felt considerably nettled at her preferring Sir Josias Clover's definite intentions to his indefinite ones.

"Now, Mrs. Stratheden," he says, changing the subject, "you must let us come over and spend the day to-morrow. We won't bore you very much. If you want to get rid of us in the afternoon, you can shut us up in the Folly and let us do a little 'weeding.'"

Olga laughs.

"My dear boy, you are most welcome to come; but how do you suppose two old women can undertake to amuse young men?"

Mr. Vyner turns and looks at her, thinking it a little bit of uncalled for affectation to style herself an old woman: he takes her to be about two or three-and-twenty.

"Leo likes old women," answers Raymond, mischievously: "at least I conclude so, for I never saw him devote himself to a young one."

"Perhaps he does not care for either," says Olga, turning to him with a smile. "I have heard of such cases."

Leo colors a little.

"I have never been thrown very much with ladies," he says: "my mother is dead, and I have no sisters."

"He thinks of nothing but sport," interrupts Raymond,—"sport and athletic exercises, and fills up the crevices with smoking and reading."

"I am afraid you will find it too stupid at The Manor House,"

says Olga, addressing herself to Leo. "As for this boy, I have known him ever since he was in petticoats, and he comes over when he feels inclined, makes himself perfectly at home, and never wants any entertaining."

Leo, as he says, is not much accustomed to ladies. He does not exactly know what sort of answer is expected from him, so contents himself with saying that if it will not inconvenience Mrs. Stratheden, it will give him much pleasure to accompany Raymond on the morrow.

When they have wished Olga good-by, Raymond turns to his friend.

"Mind you don't fall in love with her," he says.

Leo laughs.

"Not much fear. I think I am not very susceptible. Is she so dangerous?"

"Ah," says Raymond, "more fellows have come to grief over Olga Stratheden than over any other woman I ever knew."

"Really?" utters Leo, indifferently.

"I know I nearly broke my heart about her once," says Raymond. "But that's an old story; and we're the best friends in the world now."

"Why, my dear fellow, you must have been in your teens," laughs Leo. "What is she? a widow?"

Raymond proceeds to tell his friend the story that so many people have found strange and interesting.

CHAPTER XIII.

"The sound of the strong summer thickening
In heated leaves of the smooth apple-trees:
The day's breath felt about the ash branches,
And noises of the noon, whose weight still grew
On the hot, heavy-headed flowers, and drew
Their red mouths open till the rose-heart ached."

SWINBURNE.

"WHAT are we to do with those boys?" asks Olga of her friend the next morning at breakfast.

"What a question for the most accomplished hostess in the world!" returns Mrs. Forsyth, with a smile.

"But at the present moment, ma chère, there is nothing available but the beauties of nature,—to which young men of sporting tendencies are not usually very sensitive. A lake or stream only suggests fish to be caught; a wood, good covert; a view, the probability of its being a desirable hunting country; even the charm of a garden is the thought of cutting down the trees."

"Let them smoke and play billiards."

"They have evidently done that until they are tired of it. No. I tell you what I propose. I cannot have them with me all the afternoon: after lunch, I shall send them into the Folly and set the organ going, and about five we'll ride, and after dinner they shall row us on the lake."

"An excellent arrangement," Mrs. Forsyth agrees.

Two o'clock comes, and with it the expected guests. It is a decided relief, after the burning glare outside, to come into the deliciously cool dining-room, looking out on a sea of turf with a grand cedar in the distance. No flowers outside, but plenty in the room, in crystal bowls and vases, nestling among delicate ferns. Everything is cold, the wines are deliciously iced, the dishes are of the choicest, the salad is "a dream," and the piles of crimson strawberries, and the cream that only a model dairy can produce, delight two senses at once. Raymond and his friend quite forgot that half an hour ago they

pronounced the day unbearable, and that no limit of time under a week could get them cool.

Leo Vyner is surprised. As he told Olga last night, he has not seen much of ladies, and is not at all *au fait* of their graces and refinements. His father's house is conducted on the rough and ready principles of a man who has no womankind belonging to him, and to whom every other consideration is secondary to that of sport. Leo has been little in women's society: it bores his father, and the two are almost inseparable.

"Your mother was a most excellent woman," Mr. Vyner senior has told his son; "she was, of course, a very great loss,—an irreparable loss, I may say. But women are curious creatures: it is not good for a man to have too much to do with them; they are not rational; they cannot understand that there are considerations in a man's mind that must naturally come before them; they are always wanting to be first, and making scenes when they find they cannot. A woman who is her own mistress is about as dangerous as a tiger let loose in a crowd."

Leo has for the first time in his life the opportunity of contemplating this dangerous animal, a woman uncontrolled. He is quite ignorant on the subject of art; he knows nothing of pictures, statues, china, or such matters; he is not even a good judge of the appointments of an elegant house; but he is far more impressed in the few minutes since he entered The Manor House than he has ever been upon going into a strange house before. The refinement, the harmonious beauty of every object that meets his eye; the perfectness of every arrangement: the comfort that goes even beyond the elegance. The charm of Olga's manner is stealing across him: he knows little of style or dress, but Mrs. Stratheden's gives him a vague idea of perfection; she seems to make no effort, and yet talk flows on pleasantly, smoothly. Leo feels almost abashed: until to-day he has never been embarrassed by the consciousness of superiority in a woman. Olga's voice and smile give him a strange unaccustomed pleasure: he wishes the exigencies of society did not forbid his sitting and staring at her as a simple spectator.

"I am going to leave you to yourselves," Mrs. Stratheden says, when the pleasantly-protracted lunch has come to an end. "You can find your way to the Folly, Raymond. The organ is wound up: you have only to set it going."

"But you will come too?" persuades Raymond: "it won't be half so nice without you; and we won't smoke if you don't like it."

"Smoking does not frighten me away, as you ought to know," she answers, smiling; "but I have some letters to write. I will look in upon you presently."

"Do not be long, then," he says, going.

When Leo finds himself in the Folly, he stands still and draws a long breath: it looks to him like fairy-land.

"She is a wonderful woman," he says to himself, for about the tenth time since his arrival. Raymond is too much accustomed to the place to be in any way affected by the beauty of it, and proceeds at once to set the organ going. Leo is fond of music, although he does not in the least understand it. (Why should I say although? is it necessary for the purpose of admiring a picture that one should know how to mix colors, or is the pleasure we feel at a beautiful statue incompatible with ignorance of the art of modelling?) With the organ, the illusion is complete. The cool plashing sound of falling water, the velvety richness of the surrounding green, the tender scent and coloring of the roses, the gleaming statues of exquisite form, and the melting strains of the loveliest waltz that ever stirred the veins. Leo is strangely subdued. He has never occupied himself with the search of stimulants for his senses. Most young fellows who came into the Folly said, with enthusiasm, "What an awfully jolly place!" but it made unsophisticated Leo dumb: he almost felt as if his feet profaned such a temple.

Raymond, having set the organ going, flings himself upon a low couch and takes out his cigar-case.

"Raymond," cries Leo, in a tone of horror, "you are surely not going to smoke *here!*"

Raymond stares at him, then laughs.

"My dear fellow, this is the smoking-room *par excellence* of the house; though Mrs. Stratheden will let you smoke anywhere, except in the drawing-room. That's what makes her such a favorite: she's so awfully sensible, and always likes everybody to be happy and do what they like. Come; light up."

Somehow, Leo does not feel inclined to obey his friend's behest, but, sitting beside the fountain, allows his senses to

drink their fill of pleasure. Without being aware of it, he has an imagination; but it has steadily been kept under by the constant bodily exercise to which he has been accustomed almost from his cradle.

"Awfully jolly this, isn't it?" says Raymond, puffing indolently at his cigar.

The two words by which the rising youth are apt to designate everything that gives them pleasure, from the most trivial to the most exciting, somehow jar upon Leo, though he is quite as much a slave to paucity of expression as other young men of the day. Their inadequacy and inappropriateness strike him unpleasantly. *Jolly!* applied to this paradise of refinement.

"I suppose you don't think much of it," proceeds Raymond, not taking his friend's silence for consent. "Not in your line, eh? Now, *I* think it the most delightful place in the world."

"So do I," returns Leo, briefly.

"Oh, that's all right. You've seemed so glum and silent ever since you came, I thought the women bored you."

"Not at all," replies Leo, rather indignant with his friend, he does not quite know why. "It's too hot to talk. You smoke, and let me go to sleep."

"All right," returns Raymond. "I feel rather drowsy myself," and he shuts his eyes: "I can't do any more damage than burn a hole in my coat if I do go to sleep."

Leo never felt less sleepy in his life. Lying back in the luxurious *chaise longue*, with the music of the water in his ears, the strains of the waltz still pouring on, the subtle scent of flowers stealing through his fresh young senses, he experiences a new pleasure in life. The less ethereal part of him reflects on the choiceness of the *cuisine*, the delicate flavor of the wines with which he was lately served. The whole thing seems to him rather like a chapter out of the Arabian Nights. Many of his friends would have only pronounced everything "uncommonly well done;" Olga herself is far from feeling that she has attained perfection in her ménage; but to Leo, to whom Sybaritism is a sealed book, everything is wonderful and delightful.

"She is a sort of Circe," he says to himself, apostrophizing Olga,—"a good Circe. She could not do anything wicked or

cruel, with those eyes. She is not beautiful, but there is some charm about her more taking than beauty. I can fancy men being tremendously in love with her, as Raymond said; though I don't know that I should be one of her victims. By Jove! he's off." This as he hears a heavy, regular breathing from the other side of the fountain. "I wonder if his cigar's out?" And Leo raises himself on one elbow to look. "It's all right." Then, stopping to look a moment longer, "By Jove! what a handsome fellow he is!"

And certainly Mr. Raymond L'Estrange might have borne not unfavorable comparison with Apollo, Antinoüs, or any of the young gods renowned for beauty. The only defect in his face, if one may be permitted so contradictory a mode of expression, is its perfection which detracts from its manliness. The small head, pencilled brows, broad low forehead, Greek nose, the delicate oval of the face, and, chief beauty of all, the exquisite curves of his mouth, are indisputably effeminate; and were it not that nature has endowed him with five feet ten inches of height, and a taste for masculine pursuits, that fickle goddess might have been accused of spoiling a woman without making a handsome man. As he is, his claim to beauty is acknowledged by both sexes. Fortunately, he is too handsome to be vain, though he well knows how to take advantage of his royal prerogative. Olga, who is a slave to good looks, spoils him; so does almost every other woman: even his men friends are prone to look over a certain amount of waywardness and selfishness on account of his handsome face. He is gifted with a charming manner, too, when he is allowed his own sweet will uncontradicted, and, being his own master, well born and well endowed, life is a very pleasant and uncomplicated problem for him at the present moment.

Leo Vyner has not a tithe of his advantages. He has a fair, frank, good-looking (not handsome) face, a high spirit, immense pluck (an ugly name for courage), a certain amount of passion and determination, more brains than are necessary to prevent his being a fool, and an excellent digestion, which is, no doubt, in part the cause of his excellent temper. He is taller than Raymond by two inches, but does not look so, on account of his perfect development.

Raymond continues to sleep the sleep of the just. Leo is deep in day-dreams, a perfectly new occupation for him,—when

the door uncloses and admits Olga. He jumps to his feet in a moment. Raymond sleeps on.

"Hush!" whispers Olga, putting her finger to her lips. "Do not wake him." She stands for a moment looking down upon the sleeper. "Is it not a beautiful face?" she murmurs: "like a Greek god's."

Leo assents; but his admiration for his friend is evidently not so keen as Olga's, since one glance contents him.

"We will leave him," she says, presently. "Would you like to go over the stables?"

Has she fresh surprises in store for him? Leo wonders. He does not believe that a woman can know anything about horses, although he has seen one or two ride very straight to hounds, —a sight eminently disagreeable to him. If there is one thing in the world he cares more for than another, if there is one subject upon which his modesty permits him to think he knows more than another, it is horse-flesh.

As they stroll out together through one of the great windows of the Folly, he wonders to himself whether he is going to be quite *désillusionné* or more astonished than ever. True, he remembers noticing how well her horse and groom were turned out last night; but if she had a good head man that would be only what one might expect.

"The men are at tea," she tells him. "I always prefer coming when they are out of the way." And she conducts him from stall to stall, from loose box to loose box. For every animal she has a word and a caress, and one and all receive her with the friendly greeting noise that is the language of the Houyhnhnms. Leo looks on with unqualified approval: if he were master here and his watchful eye had supervised everything for a twelvemonth and his pocket been able to carry out his ideas, things could not be better done. That is a tremendous admission for a man who fancies his own judgment on equine matters. The construction of the stables, the horses' clothing, the temperature, even to the pattern of the plaited straw edging,—everything is just as he would have it. He examines the horses with a critical eye,—the ponies Olga drives, if one can call fifteen hands ponies, her carriage- and saddle-horses, and the two hunters she keeps for her friends. Happy friends! thinks Leo, who has nothing of his own to touch them. Then they go to the harness-room, and he looks

over harness, bits, and bridles. No sign of slackness or slovenliness here.

"You must have a first-rate man," he says to Mrs. Stratheden, not crediting her, however disposed he may be to admire her, with being the ruling genius of this department.

"Yes," answers Olga: "he is very painstaking. I had a good deal to teach him, but he has quite got into my ways now."

She makes the remark without the slightest vanity or consciousness, without any desire or idea of elevating herself in Leo's eyes. Why, indeed, should she be moved to any such consideration? She simply looks upon him as something about two removes from an Eton boy, whom being her guest, she is endeavoring to amuse.

Leo stares at her. She is sufficiently a thought-reader, and his face is expressive enough for her to arrive at a close approximation to his thought. She laughs merrily.

"I suppose you think women have no business to know anything about such matters."

"I think you are the most wonderful woman I ever met with," he says, and then blushes crimson at his own temerity.

Olga laughs again.

"When one has lived a great many years in the world," she remarks, "one ought to have gained a certain amount of experience. It is the only compensation one has for growing old."

"Why do you talk like that?" cries Leo, almost indignantly. "You are as young as—as any woman need wish to be."

His very downright and evidently sincere compliment is not unacceptable to Olga.

"Come," she says, not affecting to notice it; "let us go and see if Raymond is awake." They find that young gentleman in the act of rousing himself.

"Come and sing us something, won't you?" he says to Mrs. Stratheden. She is very good-natured, particularly as a hostess, and complies.

"For five minutes," she says: "it is too hot to sing to-day." And, without further prelude, she sits down and sings two simple ballads with a voice that seems to Leo the sweetest he has ever heard.

"Raymond," she says, rising, and shutting the piano as an

intimation that the concert is over, "I want to show you my new pistol: there is just time to try it before I put my habit on."

"All right," he answers. "I'll get the target. The usual place, I suppose?"

They go out on the lawn, the shady side of the house, and Raymond puts a bullet in the pistol.

"Be careful!" says Olga: "the pull-off is very light."

He fires three times to the left of the bull's-eye.

"I don't think it's quite true," he observes.

Olga takes it from him and fires straight into the bull's-eye.

She hands it to Leo. His shot hits the target a little to the right.

"Let me have another try," says Raymond, reloading. At the instant that his finger is on the trigger, a dog he brought with him, and which has just escaped from the stables, rushes up to him, frantic with delighted excitement. He turns sharply to chide it, his hand turns with his body, the pistol goes off, and—does *not* hit the target.

"Confound you, you brute!" he cries, angrily, to the animal, who is more excited than ever by the sound of the report. He is stooping to pick up a fresh bullet, when Olga utters a little cry and runs towards his friend. At the same instant, Leo feels a curious sensation in his left hand: blood is trickling through his fingers. He tries to raise the arm, but cannot for the pain.

"I expect I am shot in the shoulder," he says, quietly, putting up his other hand to it. As he speaks, Raymond looks up, sees the blood dripping in a pool upon the grass, and turns ghastly white; his legs seem giving way under him.

"Good God! what is it?" he cries.

"Come into the house," says Olga, not losing her presence of mind. "Do not move your arm more than you can help. Raymond, send William off on the fastest horse at once for Mr. Rushbrook; no, stop! tell Jenkins to drive the bay in the little dog-cart and to bring the doctor back with him. Don't lose a moment!"

Leo tries to make light of it, but a sick feeling is creeping over him, and the blood is running in streams down his arm now. Mrs. Stratheden hurries him into the first room they come to: she remembers with a sort of misgiving that it was

here poor George was brought after he broke his back. She makes him lie on a sofa near the open window, and rings the bell violently. The impassive Truscott appears in swift answer to this unusual summons. In a few words she explains what has happened, and bids him call the housekeeper and bring bandages and cold water.

The first thing to be done is to get his coat off. It is done; but by his deathly pallor she sees it has been almost too much for him. Not for one instant does she lose her head, although she is in an agony of terror at the sight of the blood continuing to stream from him. She remembers hearing somewhere that a man bleeding from a wound should be laid flat on the ground; she makes him lie on the floor, and sends for brandy; with her own hands she cuts his shirt from his shoulder and arm: the *grande dame*, the prude, are forgotten in the emergency, nothing but the woman is left. The bright-red blood spurts out in little jets with every pulsation, and Olga remembers, with sickening apprehension, to have heard that bright-colored blood comes from an artery. Raymond has come in, and is standing looking at her, ghastly white and shivering, helpless as a child. Her delicate laces are stained and dabbled, her white fingers are red, and yet she does not falter nor shrink. Truscott and the housekeeper are sickly pale, and tremble like leaves as they help her. Leo sees everything as if in a dream: he has no inclination to speak, but somehow he feels safe in Olga's hands. The wound is in the fleshy part of the arm: she straps and bandages it as tight as she and Truscott can, but the blood still oozes through the bandages. He has already lost a frightful quantity: everything about is saturated with it. The sight is horrible. Mrs. Forsyth, hearing of an accident, comes running, but at the sight staggers and nearly falls.

"Take her away, Raymond," cries Olga, imperiously, glad to be rid of them both; and he obeys.

Olga is distracted. She thinks the poor boy will die under her hands. Oh, how the moments creep! She looks despairingly at the clock; it is only twenty minutes since all this happened. With Bonnibel's best speed, Jenkins can but just be getting into Altham; and *the doctor may be out.* Oh, why had she not thought to tell him to bring any doctor, the first, the nearest? What can she do? what can she do? she thinks,

in an agony, seeing that the bandages seem to have no effect; and all at once she remembers that her father used to tell how a woman had once saved the life of a friend by pressing her fingers into the wound until the surgeon came. It was horrible; but what did that matter in comparison with this boy's life? She undid the bandages: the blood welled out again. She shut her teeth hard, and pressed her fingers tightly upon the bleeding arm. The effect was magical: one of her fingertips was on the artery, and checked the flow at once. And there she sat beside him on the floor for thirty-five minutes, during which the position became positive agony to her; but she only set her teeth harder and refused to move. When Mr. Rushbrook arrived and relieved her, she fainted. On coming to herself, she was on her own bed, with Mrs. Forsyth and the doctor bending over her. She had not the faintest recollection of what had happened,—only had a shuddering instinct of something horrible.

"Come, come, that's right!" are the first words she hears in the voice of Mr. Rushbrook, who has known her from a child. "We shall do now."

"What is the matter," she asks, faintly, a strange confusion making havoc with her senses. "Have I been shot?"

"No, no, my darling," answers Mrs. Forsyth, hastily: "it was Mr. Vyner, Raymond's friend. He is doing quite well now, thanks to you."

"Thanks indeed," echoes the doctor. "But for you it's very doubtful whether he wouldn't have been in a better world by now."

"What have you done with him?" asks Olga, faintly.

"I have stopped the bleeding and left Truscott to look after him. He must not be moved. I have ordered a bed to be put up in the room. You'll have him for a visitor longer than you bargained for when you asked him to spend the day."

CHAPTER XIV.

"And the breath
Of her sweet tendance hovering over him
Filled all the genial courses of his blood
With deeper and with ever deeper love,
As the southwest that blowing Bala lake
Fills all the sacred Dee. So passed the days."

Enid.

RAYMOND is distracted, and wanders about like a restless spirit: the poor fellow feels as if his unlucky accident had marked him with the brand of Cain. Mrs. Stratheden is in her room, Mrs. Forsyth with her, and the doctor will not hear of his going near Leo, who is to be kept perfectly quiet. So he elects dismally to go home and carry the dreadful news to his mother.

"Have my horse put to," he says, dolefully, to Jenkins; "and I shall be glad if you'll keep that brute of a dog here till to-morrow. I can't bear the sight of him. I feel as if I should shoot him if I took him home."

"Very good, sir," responds the automatical Jenkins.

So poor Nep, howling and tugging at his chain, hears his master go off without him, all unsconcious, poor beast, of the dire misfortune he has brought on that beloved head. After a couple of hours' persistent efforts, he succeeds in slipping his collar, and arrives at home in time to appear, like Banquo's ghost, at his master's dinner. He is forthwith consigned to the stables, still ignorant of his crime.

Meanwhile, Leo having been put to bed, remains in a state of drowsiness and helplessness perfectly new to the young athlete: he feels no inclination to think or speak, and does not even feel surprised or concerned at the very unusual position in which he finds himself. In the evening Olga comes to see him. He experiences a sensation of pleasure, and has a vague remembrance that she has done some great thing for him. He wants to thank her, and opens his lips, but the words do not come readily.

"Hush!" she says, putting her finger to her lips: "you are not to speak a word." And then, without the slightest consciousness, just as if she were his nurse, she lays her cool hand on his brow. Leo's eyes glisten at her soft touch: it is a new sensation to him, a most pleasant one.

"Don't take it away," he murmurs; and Olga sits down on the edge of the bed and continues to pass her hand over his forehead and his fair cropped curls until it has the mesmeric effect of sending him to sleep.

Mrs. Forsyth, who has come in with her, sits in an arm-chair and contemplates the picture. A little smile, half amused, half malicious, plays on her lip.

"I am very sorry for that boy," she says, when she and Olga are sitting, a little later, in the latter's boudoir.

"So am I," answers Olga.

"I do not mean so much for the accident as for the probable results."

"You think it will leave him weak for a long time?"

"Weak in his head," replies her friend. "Seriously, Olga, I think it would be kinder of you to leave him to me and Truscott."

"Ma chère," says Olga, "I think you are pleased to speak in parables."

"It is a very dangerous position for a young man to be nursed by a charming woman. He will fall in love with you."

"Absurd!" exclaims Olga, petulantly. "I am old enough to be his mother."

"Hardly."

"At all events, I shall nurse him as if I were," answers Olga, with determination. "Would you have me leave the boy to servants? I did not think you were so heartless, ma chère."

"I will take care of him: and he would have no difficulty in looking upon me as a mother."

"Certainly not" (with decision). "The accident happened to him in my house, and I consider it *my duty* to look after him."

"Well, my love, you will prove an excellent nurse, I am quite sure," returns Mrs. Forsyth. "It is wonderful that such a fragile creature should have so much nerve. Very few women could have done what you did to-day. I am afraid *I*

behaved like a sad coward; but the sight was too dreadful. I never could bear to see blood."

"Ma chère," returns Olga, "if there had been no one else to do it, you or any other woman would have done the same: you could not have let the poor boy die before your eyes. It was a most unfortunate thing altogether. I think poor Raymond is almost the most to be pitied. I wish he had not gone without my seeing him. I never will have a pistol or a rifle out again for amusement. Poor papa always said it was the most dangerous thing in the world."

Mrs. Stratheden gets very little sleep that night. Her nerves have been terribly shaken. All night, between sleeping and waking, she enacts the horrible scene again and again, and is thankful when morning comes and she can go out into the air. Having heard that he has passed a quiet night and is still sleeping, she orders her horse, and at eight o'clock is in the saddle. This very unusual event does not find Jenkins unprepared: he and his horses are as well turned out as if the time were five o'clock P.M. and the scene May Fair.

It is *such* a morning. "How *can* people remain in bed the best part of the day!" thinks Olga, as she canters swiftly across the common, with the delicious breeze kissing her cheek and rippling her dark hair. There was once a great poet who wrote the following lines, or something like them, apropos of those who slumber in the morning:

> "Who would in such a gloomy state remain
> Longer than Nature craves, when every Muse
> And every blooming pleasure waits without
> To bless the wildly devious morning walk?"

The author of those celebrated lines was a proverbially late riser. Madam Olga's usual breakfast-hour is ten; and that is "positively her first appearance." On this occasion she is far more conscious of the virtue of being up so early than she had ever been of the sin of losing the best hours of the day. She is on her way to L'Estrange Hall, to set Raymond's mind at rest about his friend: his place is something under four miles from The Manor House. She has not ridden quite half-way, when she meets him bowling swiftly along in his stanhope. He turns pale at the unexpected apparition of Mrs. Stratheden out at this unearthly time of the morning, as he considers it.

"He has had a good night: he is going on famously," Olga hastens to say, as he stops beside her.

"Thank God!" cries Raymond, with a sigh of relief that comes from the very bottom of his heart. "It's no use going on to inquire, then," he proceeds, rather plaintively: "though heaven knows what I'm to do with myself all the livelong day, now I've got up so early."

"Have a ride with me," says Olga, "and come back to breakfast. You can ride Jenkins's horse, and he can go home with your man."

"I should like it awfully," cries the young fellow, giving the reins to his groom and jumping down with great alacrity. "I'm not exactly in riding trim; but that doesn't matter this time in the morning."

Jenkins dismounts, lengthens the stirrups, and Raymond is on the chestnut's back in a second.

"Olga, what a darling you are!" he cries, putting his hand on hers when the grooms are out of sight.

(I must explain that, in consideration of his youth and his having once fancied himself broken-hearted on her account, Raymond is now and then permitted, generally under protest, to give way to his affectionate feelings.)

"You behaved like a heroine, and I stood gaping like a fool and didn't know what in the world to do. I believe he would have died if it hadn't been for you."

"Nothing of the sort," returns Olga; "but I have often thought how necessary it is to know what to do in case of sudden emergencies: I mean, to get up the treatment of casualties."

"How does he look? Have you seen him? Do you think the doctor will let me have a peep at him to-day?" Raymond asks. "And to think of the awful trouble I've put you to! Now, if it had happened at home, it wouldn't have been half so bad: only I suppose it would have killed my poor mother. She's in a dreadful way, as it is."

"I am very thankful it happened where it did, as it was to happen," answers Olga.

"When will he be able to be removed?" asks Raymond.

"Oh, that's not to be thought of for ages; and it will be a little excitement for Mrs. Forsyth and myself, having a young man to nurse."

"Olga" (rather jealously), "don't make too much fuss over him. He'll be falling in love with you."

"Don't be ridiculous!" answers Mrs. Stratheden. "I am an old woman, as I have told you before. And I will not allow you to call me Olga: it is not respectful."

"I will when no one is by," he answers, with a petulant flash of his hazel eyes. "Olga! Olga! You look about nineteen this morning; and I should like to kiss you."

Mrs. Stratheden cannot help laughing.

"My dear boy, you are getting far too precocious. If you behave like this, ancient as I am, I shall be obliged to have a chaperon by when you come to see me, and ma chère's office will no longer be a sinecure."

"I wish to heaven I was ten years older," cries Raymond. "Would you marry me if I were?"

She turns and looks admiringly at his handsome face.

"No, my dear," she answers, after a pause. "I never met any one more calculated to give a wife chronic heartache than you." To soften her words, she gives the hand so close to hers a little squeeze, and sets her horse going at a hand-gallop over the short turf in the direction of home.

All day Leo remains tolerably quiet and easy, but towards night his mind begins to wander. He fancies himself in the Folly, with the water plashing into the marble basin and the organ playing softly and the white marble statues gleaming through the leaves. Presently he looks up and sees Olga standing in the doorway, smiling and putting her finger to her lips. Then, as he looks, she turns ghastly pale, her white dress is stained crimson, and she is bending over something that lies at her feet. He tries hard to raise himself to see what or who it is, but unseen hands drag him back. Over and over again this scene repeats itself. Then he sees her standing in the same place, only three times more beautiful, with a golden crown on her head. Raymond is lying on the other side of the fountain, asleep. A malicious smile comes into her eyes: she raises her wand, and Raymond's beautiful face begins to change and change to the semblance of a swine's, and downwards to his limbs creeps the horrid transformation, till he grovels at her feet. Then she turns her eyes to him, and he shrieks out. Olga comes into the room at midnight to look at him, and hears him cry, "Circe! Circe!" and fancies

it is a race-horse, or a favorite dog. Little does she dream that it is herself, in the form of the dangerous enchantress of Ææa, whose pity he is invoking.

For a week Leo lies in bed. The bullet has been extracted: he is doing remarkably well, the doctor says, but perfect quiet is necessary. His arm is painful, but he is very brave and patient, and will scarcely admit that he suffers. Olga devotes herself to him, watches over him like a child, and one day, noticing that his dinner is not nicely cut up, she undertakes the task of feeding him herself. She has such exquisitely gentle delicate ways. Leo watches her as if she were a being from another sphere, and, watching her, no wonder that he loses head and heart too.

Ten days go by. With this tender nursing and his iron constitution, Leo is convalescent: he is permitted to lie on the sofa by the window: in a day or two he is to go into the Folly. Strange to relate, this young Hercules, who has never had a day's illness, who one might imagine would chafe furiously at his enforced confinement, looks forward with positive pain to getting well, and will not be induced to take a hopeful view of his case.

"I never knew such a fellow," exclaims Mr. Rushbrook: "he gets quite irritable when I try to cheer him up. But there! that's the way with the strong ones: they always insist on taking the worst possible view of the case when they ail anything."

Leo has become considerably attached to Truscott, who, besides being an admirable servant, is very kind-hearted and as gentle as a woman. Truscott is devoted to his mistress, and Leo has a mania for hearing over and over again Mrs. Stratheden's heroic behavior after his accident, which Truscott seems equally fond of expatiating upon.

"Poor young fellow!" he says to himself: "he's going the way of most of 'em. But there! I don't wonder at it: only it does seem a pity she can't give over those ways of hers that does so much mischief."

Raymond comes over regularly every day to see his friend, an attention which the latter is sometimes ungracious enough not to appreciate, especially when he sees Olga's graceful figure sailing across the lawn with Raymond in close attendance, or gets glimpses of them from his window rowing to and fro on the

lake. Besides, when Raymond is not there, Mrs. Stratheden brings some little delicate shred of lace-work and sits with him, or reads to him, or, best of all, mesmerizes him. Olga believes to a certain extent in mesmerism, and rather fancies her own gift of electricity: therefore, when Leo, with a duplicity very much opposed to his open nature, pretends to the most marvellous effects of her mesmerism, and actually feigns to go to sleep under it, she readily consents to use her soothing influence for his benefit. It is mesmerism, no doubt, and of a very dangerous character, the delight that he feels at the touch of her delicate fingers on his brow and hair (for he refuses to believe in the efficacy of passes of the hand made at a distance). Olga, who is sympathetic to a fault, and who would take the utmost trouble to alleviate the sufferings of horse, dog, cat, or any other animal in pain, benevolently puts herself to no small trouble for Leo's pleasure and comfort, and is firmly convinced that she is doing him good. From having done so much in his behalf, she feels an interest in him that a month of close acquaintance in an ordinary way would have failed to produce. Now he is getting well she talks to him: the freshness, the healthiness of his ideas please and almost surprise her: he has not acquired the *blasé*, superficial, sceptical tone affected by the *jeunesse* of this age.

As for Leo, he is as madly in love as a man only can be who loves for the first time in that golden space between youth and manhood, who has not wasted his best years on unworthy passions, nor grown, from contact with impurity, to doubt purity, but who loves with all passion and reverence combined, and who believes in the woman he loves as he believes in God. And if the woman, as sometimes happens, is older than himself, if, as does not often happen, she is gifted with an exquisite tact and delicacy, a perfect *savoir faire*, an *entourage* of wealth, luxury, and perfect taste,—well, all that can be said is that to fall in love under such circumstances is a woful misfortune for a young fellow, if there seems as little chance as there does in Leo's case of fruition crowning his hopes, and that it is likely to go very hard with him.

Leo lets the delicious poison steal through his veins: he never tries to check it, nay, fosters it by thinking of his idol when she is absent, and gazing at her picture. For one day when she brought him a book of photographs to look over, he

found a colored vignette of her that pleased him, and carefully abstracted it. But, after gazing at it for a few hours with secret delight, and running the risk of injuring the colors by pressing it to his lips, his mind began to misgive him that he had done an ungentlemanlike thing in taking it without permission. The next time Olga came in, he told her with a deep blush what he had done, and asked permission to retain it. Mrs. Stratheden smiled, and consented: after all, it is not a very unusual or audacious request in the present day for a man to ask for a lady's portrait, especially under such exceptional circumstances.

"You must give me yours in exchange," she smiles, thereby making matters still easier for him.

"I shall be delighted," he answers; though I haven't been taken since I was at Oxford, and that was in flannels. A man looks such a fool in a photograph; and I take worse than most fellows. One eye is generally twice the size of the other, and my mouth literally from ear to ear."

Olga looks at him. It is a comely face enough, though utterly wanting in those fine curves and contours that make the beauty of Raymond's. The skin, though pale now, is of that fair and healthy hue through which you may see the swift blood course when he is excited by exercise or strong feeling; the white of his eyes is almost as blue as a bird's egg, and clear, without vein or speck; his teeth are white, regular, and pearly-looking (though he was once foolhardy enough to bite a nail in two with them for a wager); and he has that generally fresh, clean look that especially distinguishes an Englishman. Olga has conceived quite an affection for her nursling. She will be sorry when he is well enough to leave her.

"I should think you might very well be moved to the Hall in a day or two," remarks Raymond, cheerfully, one morning, nearly three weeks after the accident.

Somehow, Leo does not jump at the suggestion.

"I don't know," he says, rather coldly. "I don't fancy I could bear four miles of jolting just yet."

"Well, you know, old fellow," pursues Raymond, confidentially, "the truth is that I feel frightfully, giving Mrs. Stratheden all this trouble. She has behaved like an angel about it, but all the same one can't help feeling it must have

been a dreadful bore for her. And I am entirely responsible for it."

Leo is not very strong yet: his lip quivers; he has some little difficulty in commanding his voice.

"No one can feel more keenly than I do," he says, at last, in a cold voice, "the trouble I have given Mrs. Stratheden, and—and every one else: still——"

"My dear old Leo, don't talk like that! Why, if it had only been at home, you know I wouldn't have minded what had to be done. I would have sat up with you all night myself; anything I could do to atone for my dreadful misfortune I should have done thankfully; you know that. It was only on Olga—on Mrs. Stratheden's account."

Gall to wormwood! he calls her Olga! A pang of bitter jealousy gnaws poor Leo's heart. Raymond loves her still; perhaps—away, O horrible perhaps! At this moment Olga comes in, carrying a lovely rosebud.

"For you," she says, with a smile, giving it into Leo's hand.

O poor tender little rosebud! what had you done to deserve so cruel a fate? to be scorched by the hot kisses of a mortal; to have your tender leaves crushed against his strong beating heart; when you were faint and athirst, to have only two salt tears for drink. This is your doom hereafter; but now you are taken with a gentle hand, placed in water, and looked at and praised and glorified. Some such a story one has heard of out of the flower-world before to-day.

"I am telling Leo," cries Raymond, cheerfully, "that I think he might soon be moved now,—in a day or two, perhaps."

"I have been a trouble to you and your household too long already," says poor Leo; but Olga detects a tremor in his voice.

"But I shall not let you go," she answers, smiling, "however anxiously you may want to get away."

Leo's eyes are so extremely expressive at this moment that Olga looks out of the window, and Raymond says to himself, in disgust,—

"Hang me if I don't believe the fellow is falling in love with her!"

"I am very proud of my patient," pursues Olga, "and I

am not going to risk a relapse. I shall keep you, at all events, for another week; not a day less."

Leo feels this to be the happiest moment of his life. The certainty of another week, seven whole days, seven times twenty-four hours, in the adored presence,—well, not exactly that, but to be under the same roof with her,—is intensest bliss.

Raymond is by no means so enchanted. An hour later, when he is strolling beside Mrs. Stratheden under the trees, he says, petulantly,—

"I suppose you know that Leo is head over ears in love with you. Under the circumstances, I think it is neither very wise nor very kind to keep him staying on here, when he is perfectly well able to be moved."

"Don't talk nonsense, Raymond!"

"It is not nonsense, Olga, and you know it perfectly well."

"It *is* nonsense," retorts Olga, with a little stamp, and a flash of her eyes; "and I forbid you to say such a thing to me again."

But, truth to tell, Olga is not quite easy in her own mind.

"Of course," says Raymond, huffily, "that's only what one might expect from a woman. But I did think you were different."

"Oh, indeed!" answers Olga, with a gleam of mischief in her eyes. "It was very kind of you to except me from the common herd. Still, as a rule, if you have a theory it's more comfortable to have it entirely free from exceptions."

"I don't know why women were invented," says Raymond, gloomily.

"Well," replied Olga, with a little smile, "'taking it all round,' as you would say, it might have saved a good deal of misery and discomfort if there had only been one sex; but I am apt to think we might all have found it a little dull at times."

CHAPTER XV.

"Have you discovered what variety of little things affect the heart, and how surely they collectively gain it?"

Lord Chesterfield's Letters.

THE happiest week of his life,—so Leo chronicles his seven days' reprieve. Now that the term of his visit is definitely fixed, it costs him little effort to throw off the invalid. He walks about the garden with his hostess, spends some time every morning in the stables, even goes out driving with Olga in her pony-carriage.

To think he could ever become such a *fainéant* as to find utter happiness in lounging by a woman's side, asking nothing more than to watch her as she holds the ribbons. Still, such a case is not without a precedent, even besides the notable one of Omphale and her hero.

Olga is conscious of a pang. There can be no doubt now as to his love for her: nay, it is so transparent that butler, footmen, and grooms, unless they are as blindly unobservant as they have the good manners to pretend to be, must be perfectly aware of it. True, he never addresses her but with the most reserved respect, but his blue eyes have a gift of expression which he does not himself suspect, and even a child might notice the adoring looks he turns upon her when she addresses him on the most trifling subject. Olga is genuinely sorry, all the more so because it is impossible for any doubt to creep into her mind as to the utter truth and disinterestedness of his affection. And yet he has not spoken a syllable on the subject. Perhaps mesmerism has established a *rapport* between them that enables her to comprehend his feelings as she does. Not that she can gauge their depth, their passion, their intensity: to do that she must have known a like passion herself. And if once in a measure she did, it is so long ago that the memory has grown dim. Mrs. Forsyth, after her first hint, has seemed as unconscious of what is going on as Truscott or James or William. When Olga does not ask her

opinion upon a subject she religiously abstains from giving it: this is the key to her influence. Olga would not have liked interference from her best friend, and has enough common sense to guide her on the rare occasions when she does not choose to ask advice. As a rule, she consults Mrs. Forsyth upon every subject, small and great, particularly on the not unfrequent subject of her lovers.

The days go by, the golden grains of pleasure mix with the infinite sands of Time, and drip away remorselessly through the hour-glass, howsoever Love's hands may outstretch to stay them, and Leo begins to look unwillingly at the future that will so soon make this happiness a past. He has regarded life as a thing to look forward to joyously, boldly, as a young eagle soars at the sun: the one thing that has seemed to him awful, terrible, is the idea of being cut out of it, struck down in youth. And now, though the prospect before him is precisely what it was a month ago, though he may hunt, and shoot, fish, leap, run, box, as ever, though the sports and pastimes that made life what it was to him may be his as freely as of yore, he has a horrible misgiving that it is not going to be the same joyous thing as hitherto. Can one face, one voice, make pleasure pain, pain pleasure? He would not have believed it a few little weeks ago; not in his own case, at least.

The possibility of winning Olga is as remote to him as that of winning an angel from heaven,—Olga, who (in his opinion, at least) possesses every charm, who is fit for the highest sphere a woman can attain, and who, he has learned from Mrs. Forsyth, has refused high rank and wealth. Wealth! that obstacle is enough, let alone any other, to fix an insuperable gulf between them. She has everything, he nothing,—comparatively speaking, at least. His father has a fair income and makes him a handsome allowance. But suppose the positions reversed, and he were rich and Mrs. Stratheden poor: how could he for an instant presume to think the mistress of so many perfections would see anything in him to care for? Leo is none the worse for having such a modest opinion of himself.

The last day comes. There is still something to cling to: he is to stay with Raymond until the 11th, when they start for Scotland together; but it will be quite different. She will ask him over to lunch and to dine, perhaps in a formal way,

and Raymond will always be there. This last day is full of sunshine and sweetness: he spends all of it with her, looking with hungered eyes at the dear face that will be out of his horizon to-morrow, learning by heart every turn of the graceful head, every curve of the lip, the droop of her broad eyelids, the languorous beauty of her eyes. Leo, unversed in feminine perfections, has yet observed with delight the smallness of her arched feet, the delicate beauty of her hands. Little does Olga credit him with such powers of observation: like a woman who loves to please and who is not vain, she is always more conscious of the graces she thinks she lacks than of those it is obvious she possesses.

The short day is sped. He has been like her shadow all day,—in her boudoir, in the Folly, in the garden, on the water, in her pony-carriage. Raymond has not been much at The Manor House during the last week; he is a little bit offended with both Olga and Leo, though he scarcely knows why himself, and there is rather a pretty girl come to stay with Kitty Fox. Olga is genuinely sorry to lose her guest, though one might imagine that to entertain a stranger for nearly a month would be apt to grow irksome. It has given her something to do, something to think about,—the greatest boon to a woman of her temperament, apt as she is to grow morbid when left to herself.

"If it had been Raymond," she tells herself, "fond as I am of him, he would have worried me to death long before this. He would have grown cross and restless and bored, and would have spent part of the time making love to me, and the rest in enveloping me and the whole sex in a comprehensive torrent of abuse. But this boy has been so patient and gentle, so thankful to everybody, and so good-tempered. And it must have been frightfully tedious to such a strong young fellow to lie on a sofa or wander about after a couple of women all day."

The moon is riding aloft in the deep sky when they come out from dinner.

"Ma chère," says Olga, "send for a shawl and come out: it is a positive sin to be indoors this lovely night. Come, Mr. Vyner, let us go down to the water."

Leo needs no second command: he is by her side on the lawn. Mrs. Forsyth nods pleasantly, saying, "I will follow you," which, however, she has no intention of doing.

"I like to win people's gratitude," she has told Olga, on occasion, "and I know no way of doing it thoroughly or so cheaply as by occasionally depriving them of the pleasure of company. I do not mean you, my dear."

Mrs. Forsyth also finds a nap after dinner much pleasanter than doing duenna. So Olga and Leo take their way across the lawn to the water-side. It is "as bright as day," some people would say; but, oh, how utterly different is the moon's lovely light either from dawn, or garish day, or soft twilight! Who is proof against the beauty of a moonlight night?—the radiance, the tenderness, the exquisite hush of it. Even when the moon shines on a stone pavement between two rows of houses, it is pleasant to look upon: *how much more* when she lies on the bosom of a lake, on broad meadow-lands, on the folded cups of the flowers; when she trickles through the leaves of the great trees, makes a silver mirror of each little water-pool, and, great alchemist that she is, transmutes even a gravel path into gold inlaid with precious stones! Poor besonged, besonneted moon! whom the prosiest pen cannot scribble of without trying to invent a bit of original flattery for! how weary must thou be in thine own eternal perfection of men's labored adulation!

Olga's keen senses are filled with the beauty of the night; she feels little inclination to talk; and Leo's soul is disturbed by love, by present pleasure, by remembering how these delicious moments are trickling away, bearing him towards to-morrow,—a barren, cold to-morrow, since she will have gone out of it for him. They have strolled up and down, and are now sitting under a tree, watching the water. It lies there like a sheet of glass, and in it you may see the dark yews and junipers, the tall shrubs, the lofty trees: so bright it is you may see, too, the colors of the reflected flowers, azure and orange, sapphire and amaranth. A tiny ripple steals across and shivers the mirror into a thousand sprays of diamonds. Silence is perilous: the moon is allowed to be dangerous to the senses. All at once, with an irresistible impulse of passion, Leo throws himself down beside the woman he loves, and, in a voice shaken and quivering with strong feeling, cries to her, "What shall I do without you this time to-morrow!"

Olga is startled. Her immense fund of tact and *savior-faire* does not at this moment supply her with the precise knowledge

of what to do and say. She feels intuitively that this genuine and unpremeditated burst of feeling is not to be treated like an ordinary vulgar declaration. The moonlight shows her the workings of Leo's face,—the mixed passion and reverence in it, the love of the woman controlled by the worship of something higher that he imagines in her. And, to tell the truth, a simple passion that had nothing of a higher adoration in it would have found but scant favor in Olga's eyes.

She acts more on the impulse to console him than on the consideration of what prudence demands, as she puts out her hand to him and says, "I shall miss you very much, too."

The touch of her little hand thrills him to his heart's core: he covers it with kisses. And then his heart breaks into a rushing torrent of words, like a mountain-stream that has burst its banks.

"Don't be angry with me; don't think me mad. I never meant to tell you—I don't know what came over me just now, but I love you. Love you! ah, I think it must be something deeper, stronger than love. Love seems such a poor little weak word to express what I feel. Don't laugh at me! no, you won't do that; you are too good and kind; but I have never loved a woman before, and I feel that I cannot bear to think of life away from you. I always looked forward to life: it seemed to me as long as I could hunt and shoot I *must* be happy; and now I don't know how I shall live through the days without the sight of you."

If pity is akin to love, Olga must be very near loving Leo, she is so sorry for him. His strong young frame is shaken like a reed, his blue eyes devour her face for one gleam of hope. She lays a hand softly on the fair-haired head. A feeling of tenderness creeps over her such as a woman can only feel for a man younger than herself, or who is sick or somehow needs her protection. To the most impassioned words of a man of the world she would have listened, nay, had listened, with coldness, even shrinking. Leo inspired no such feeling. Indeed, she was very much inclined to stoop down and kiss him for sheer pity's sake, only that such a proof of sympathy might be dangerous.

"My dear boy," she says, looking genuinely grieved, and speaking in the most maternal tone she can command, "you know every one must be in love for the first time: it is quite

a natural disorder" (she smiles, but he does not respond), "and has to be gone through, like measles or whooping-cough. But you know I am years older than you. Think of me as a friend. an elder sister, think that I am fond of you, as indeed I am. and that when you want sympathy or help you have only to come to me."

This magnanimous offer does not seem to make much impression on Leo. He looks at her with some reproach.

"I have read in books of women saying those sort of things," he says. "Of the two, I had rather you had been angry with me for my presumption."

"Presumption! nonsense!" replies Olga. "A woman is always flattered by a sincere affection being offered her."

"Sincere affection!" groans the poor lad. "Oh, if I could only make some enormous sacrifice to prove to you that I love you for all time, all eternity!"

At this moment he is capable, were it in his power, of committing a sublime folly equal to that of the Duke of Medina, who for love of Elizabeth of France, Queen of Spain, at a fête he gave, burned his palace, and with it pictures, tapestries. all he possessed, for the sake of holding her in his arms one moment and whispering his love in her ear as he bore her from the flames. Olga smiles a sad little smile. She has heard these passionate declarations before, uttered in as good faith; she knows how these tropical flowers, the growth of burning suns, languish and die under the cold shadow of custom and satiety. And yet there is something in this young fellow that stamps him different from those who have gone before: she has a warmer liking for him than she has had this many a long day for a man. If love could only last! the thought comes swiftly into her brain, and takes flight again as quickly.

"I know you are as far removed from me as if I were the poorest beggar," Leo hurries on, in his impassioned tones. "How could I expect *you*, the cleverest, the most beautiful, most charming woman in the world, to look upon me as anything but a stupid young lout, whom you would have never stooped to notice but for that blessed accident!"

"Leo," she whispers, calling him by his name for the first time, "I will not have you talk in that way. My dear boy, all that I am and have would be a very poor excuse for your throwing away the best years of your life upon an old woman."

"What do you mean?" he cries, a bright-red flush mounting to his brow.

"I mean nothing," she answers, hastily. "I will be your best friend, as I told you; you may come to me when you like, and as often as you like; but never think, never speak of this again."

"And do you imagine," he cries, hotly, "that I could bear to see you day after day, to look at your dear, beautiful face, and know that I was never to be anything more to you?—perhaps to see some other man come and steal you away from before my very eyes? No!" (passionately), "I would rather throw myself into that lake!"

It is marvellous what great results spring from trifles. Leo, who half an hour before had not presumed even to hint at his love for Olga, is now using language so bold to her that it startles him when he recollects it later.

There is silence between them: he dares not plead his cause, dares not ask for hope, and yet he feels that to leave her thus is like tearing the heart from his body.

"You will soon be able to shoot, now," Mrs. Stratheden says, wishing to break the awkwardness of the pause; "then hunting will begin: you will go back more keen than ever to your old pursuits. It is only idleness that has put this mischief into your brain."

He looks up at her.

"Do you believe what you say?" he asks, in a low, mortified voice. "You have even a poorer opinion of me, then, than I thought for."

To this she makes no answer, but looks with far-off eyes at the water. After a time she says, gently,—

"It is getting late: we must be going in."

"Not yet; not yet," he pleads; and his soberer senses come creeping back to him. "Forgive me," he murmurs, very humbly. "I never meant to say a word of all this. Say you forgive me."

Olga turns her luminous eyes upon him: she does not see his sorrowful face quite clearly, by reason of a mist that has gathered before them.

"Forgive you!" she says, softly. "What have I to forgive? I feel honored by your love,—your first love, as you tell me. But you know" (with a half smile) "people never marry their

first loves. Good-by, dear Leo. I shall wish you good-by to-night; I am going over quite early to-morrow to Kitty Fox, who wants to see me, and Raymond comes for you at eleven. You will be gone before I return."

An icy chill creeps to Leo's heart. The last moment has come, then, the actual moment of parting; perhaps he may never see her again. A deadly sickness comes over him: garden, water, trees, seem reeling before his eyes. Olga sees his distress, and longs to comfort him. No one ever hated to give or to see pain as she does; her sympathy is the only feeling that can outrun her prudence. She stoops, and lays her lips on his fair close curls. As if a flame had scorched him, he starts up with kindling eyes, his impassioned face almost handsome in the intensity of its expression.

"Kiss me once more," he whispers, in a choked voice,— "only this once." He raises his lip to hers, and she stoops and kisses him. Then she rises, and says, in a quick, imperious voice, "Do not touch me! do not follow me!" and goes swiftly from him towards the house. He follows her with his eyes until the last fold of her lace has disappeared, and then he flings himself down beside the spot where an instant ago she stood.

His strong young frame is shaken by a storm of sobs. Sobs? this young Hercules six feet high? He must be very weak still from his wound.

Olga enters the house and goes to her room like one in a trance. She flings herself into a chair; it happens to stand in front of a long mirror.

"How could I do it? how could I do it?" she says over and over again to herself, and looks at the figure in the mirror to see if some strange change has come over her. A slow red color, born of vexed shame, mantles in her cheek; she hides it even from herself with her two hands.

"He was such a boy, and I was so sorry for him."

That is the answer she gives to her own question. But still it does not satisfy her.

CHAPTER XVI.

"La jolie femme n'est plus qu'un luxe importun, un apanage inquiétant, une enseigne périlleuse, qui a son beau côté tourné vers la rue, et dont vous n'avez que le revers; ce n'est plus qu'un engin à attirer la foudre." OCTAVE FEUILLET.

MIGNON has been married three months. After that outbreak of passion on her wedding-day, the reader will probably expect to find her at home with her parents, whilst her husband wanders the world broken-hearted. Very different, however, is the reality. Sir Tristram and Lady Bergholt are in Rome, living apparently in perfect amity. Mignon is like a spiteful child: when angered, she morally pinches and scratches the offender vigorously, but, being pacified by her vengeance, soon regains her equanimity, and expects her victim to forget the outbreak as she herself forgets it. She is capable, on no very great provocation, of saying things bitter and cruel enough to alienate friends and lovers for all time, but trusts to the same lovely mouth that has given the offence to atone for it by a smile or a kiss.

Lady Bergholt is perfectly satisfied with her position. She has adopted the rôle of a fine lady as if she had played it all her life, and is keenly alive to the advantages conferred by rank and wealth. She had undervalued them a few months ago, simply because they were a sealed book to her; now she appreciates them to the full. Her respect for Sir Tristram is increased by the attention she sees universally paid to him, nor can she help being impressed by his perfect breeding and unfailing courtesy towards people in all ranks of life.

His tenderness towards herself is infinite. The world, observing it, smiles, and says, "No wonder he is devoted to such a lovely creature;" though had the world been witness of a certain scene we recall on an October afternoon, it might deem it less a matter of course. Mignon finds the adoration of a middle-aged husband the most irksome feature of the situation; and yet how careful he is not to weary nor disgust her! Her words are cut into his heart: "*You knew I hated*

you all along, but you would marry me." The fear lest she should some day repeat them makes an arrant coward of him. If they had never been uttered, he would probably have adored and spoiled her, but he would not have been the slave to the fear of contradicting her that he is now. Loving her as idolatrously as he does (none the less for her cruelty, as is the habit of men), he desires more than anything on earth to make her love him in return, and thinks to do so by gratifying her every wish, ignorant, as people in love ever are, that by too much adoration he humbles himself in the sight of his divinity.

Mignon, fortunately perhaps for herself, is cold: the beneficent Providence who awards that attribute to many lovely women gives a security to their possessors that no amount of locks and bolts could bestow. "Love laughs at locksmiths;" but a beautiful icicle laughs at Love,—which disconcerts that young gentleman far more. It is very improbable that Mignon, in spite of her youth, her loveliness, and her comparative indifference to her husband, will ever risk her position and personal comfort for an imprudent passion. She has no ardent aspirations, no hunger of the heart: to be beautifully dressed, to feel herself the cynosure of all eyes, to live daintily, are things infinitely more desirable in her eyes than the uncertain bliss and the certain suffering that accompany the tender passion.

Mignon has enjoyed her foreign travel immensely,—the utter novelty of it, the cheerful bustle of Continental towns, the perpetual feast of shop-gazing, heightened by the delight of having plenty of money to spend, to say nothing of the change from being an unconsidered insignificant person at home to a great lady, the object of universal solicitude and attention.

"And to think I was so near giving it all up!" she has said to herself more than once, and a little flutter agitated her breast at the recollection of her narrow escape. "I might have been sitting over tea and shrimps in an attic now as Mrs. Oswald Carey, or perhaps tea without the shrimps. And I never cared two straws for him, either."

There is one thing that bores Mignon stupendously, and that is Art.

"I never want to see a picture again as long as I live," she

remarks, pettishly, to Sir Tristram, on her arrival in the Eternal City; "and as for statues, I hate the very sight of them."

This is apropos of his suggesting a visit to the Vatican and telling her of the treat in store for her in the contemplation of its treasures.

"Hush, my child!" he answers, smiling: "don't let any one hear you utter such a barbarism!"

Mignon pouts her adorable mouth and assumes the *mutine* expression that is almost as irresistible as her smile.

"I don't care who hears me," she exclaims. "I have seen Holy Families enough in the last two months to pave London with, besides getting the horrors from pictures of every kind of torture, to say nothing of the ugly saints and cadaverous martyrs of whom I should like to have a bonfire made for Guy Fawkes's Day. And as for the statues" (with an injured air that makes him laugh), "I wonder you like to take me to see them. I don't think they are *nice* at all."

The idea of the wonders of all time, that millions have gazed upon with devout adoration for their transcendent art, not being *nice* is so intensely ludicrous to Sir Tristram that he goes off into a peal of laughter, whereat Mignon reddens with displeasure.

"I dare say I seem very ignorant to you," she says, with a Parthian glance, "but you must remember that I am very young. You of course cannot enter into my feelings."

My lady knows the exact joint of the harness where to send her shaft, and is a very expert markswoman.

Her husband winces.

"You shall not go anywhere that you do not like, my darling," he answers. "Go and put on one of your pretty Paris toilettes. We will drive in the Pincio, and can take a look at the Colosseum first."

This proposition finds favor in Mignon's eyes: she smiles, and runs away to make herself beautiful. Sir Tristram looks after her with a sigh.

"If I were twenty years younger!" he thinks to himself.

There are a good many English in Rome, and among them Sir Tristram finds several friends and acquaintances. It is with no little pride that he presents his lovely young wife to them and observes the unqualified admiration that she excites.

Mignon is delighted: life is beginning, she feels,—the life

for which she bartered her beauty. Just now she is inclined to think herself no loser by the transaction. If my lady has occasional fits of temper, she keeps them, as a well-bred woman should, for her husband and her maid. Nó one can be sweeter, more angelic, than Mignon when she likes; and, truth to tell, she is not at all ill-tempered. Why indeed should she be, with everything her heart can desire (love not being at the present included among its desires), a magnificent constitution, and perfect immunity, both physically and morally, from the pains and troubles flesh is heir to? Her occasional habit of riding rough-shod over the feelings of others proceeds more from a lack of fine feeling and perception than from absolute cruelty. People who are very thick-skinned are not apt to study the shades and inflections that may torture more delicately organized subjects. Mignon takes pains to be charming, and succeeds perfectly: has not her lovely face already robbed the task of half its difficulty? She has not the slightest *mauvaise honte*, and, in the majesty of her own beauty, her self-complacency makes her feel the equal of a duchess.

Among the English in Rome are Sir Josias and Lady Clover, *née* Kitty Fox. What need to say that since her marriage she is known to her friends by no other name than that of "Sweet Kitty Clover"? Marriage has not had a sobering effect upon the frolicsome little lady: she is quite as arch and full of fun as in her maiden days. She has married a man whom (if you were a tyro in the world's ways, and in those ways much more past finding out, the ways of a woman) you would pronounce utterly unsuited to her, and the last man in the world you would have expected her to choose. But if you had qualified yourself to judge of the matter by a study of the curious combinations of opposite characteristics in the sexes that go to the making of that exceptional state of bliss, a happy marriage, you would have observed that, as a rule, that bliss has fallen to the lot of those whose natures are most opposed to each other.

A witty, brilliant man, married to a woman with the same gifts, will be far less likely to be happy with her than with one who is rather dull, but who has a thorough admiration and respect for his talents; and *vice versa*. A man with a high spirit is not the happier for having a wife of the same temperament, and so on through almost every phase of char-

acter. Certainly Miss Kitty's chief idea in accepting Sir Josias was that he would be an excellent match; but the capricious little damsel had also a kind feeling for the man whom people wondered at her choosing.

"Kitty, my dear," Mrs. Stratheden said to her, one day soon after the *fiançailles* were announced, "are you quite sure that the choice you have made will satisfy you? Remember that, on an average, you can only enjoy society and the advantages your husband's money will give you for about four hours of the twenty-four: there are still the twenty left. For the rest of your life, or the greater part of it, you will probably see him ten times as often as any other person; is the idea pleasing to you?"

"My dear, good angel," returns Miss Kitty, mischievously, "I think that ten times as much of Sir Jo's society as of anybody else's might be apt to pall upon me. He is like good old furniture, heavy. But at the same time, you know, I want a make-weight for my own lightness. Fancy if I married a madcap like myself! I know you don't think so" (more seriously), "of course no one does, but really and positively, though he is nearly twenty years older than me, and though he is slow and matter-of-fact, there is something about him I *do* like; and you and everybody else will see that we shall be very happy."

At such a long and sensible speech from Miss Kitty, Mrs. Stratheden feels encouraged, gives her a kiss and subsequently a diamond locket which figures handsomely in the Court Journal among the papier maché trays, card-cases, pen-wipers and flat candlesticks presented on the auspicious occasion of her marriage.

Sir Josias Clover is "a very good sort of man." To no one could such a designation be more thoroughly applicable. His father rose from the ranks, and ended by making a fortune and receiving a baronetcy. So the blood in Sir Josias's veins is a good sturdy British red; nor does he ever pretend to himself or the world that it is anything else. There is nothing of the *parvenu* about him. His father married late in life the daughter of a poor curate; Josias went to Eton and Oxford, and some years later, after one or two unsuccessful attempts, became a member of the "House." He is the reverse of brilliant, but has sound common sense and more than ordinary

powers of application. He is thoroughly well read, and never opens his lips upon any subject he is not conversant with. When he does get on his legs in the House, he is always listened to with attention. His constituents are so well satisfied with him that at the last election no one came forward to contest the seat. In appearance he is plain and quiet, as far removed from looking vulgar or snobbish as he is from having the air that poetry and tradition ascribe to a duke with eight centuries of Norman blood in his veins. He is manly, good-hearted, and humble in his own conceit: even now that for two months he has been blessed in the possession of Kitty, he can scarcely realize his good fortune. For he positively adores this little mischievous fairy, with her quips and pranks and wiles, and, though no one would give such a sober middle-aged man credit for it, he is capable of a love and devotion that would make many a young Adonis's passion fly up like a feather in the scale.

Kitty is aware of it, and, as she is strong, she is generous, protecting him with a little ostentatious air as delightful to behold as a kitten patronizing a Newfoundland. She bewilders him a little at times with her intense vitality and fund of spirits, but he looks on at it all with stolid benevolence, like the aforesaid Newfoundland when the kitten takes liberties. He would rather, for instance, that she did not call him Jo and Sir Jo, the abbreviation as applied to him being particularly ludicrous; but this of course is its intense charm for the little madcap, so he e'en lets her have her way. He has been weak enough to express to her his astonishment at her choice.

"Kitty," he has said, "how could you possibly, such a little fairy as you are, have anything to do with a dull matter-of-fact middle-aged fellow like myself? I have no doubt people call us Titania and Bottom."

"My dear," replies the wicked sprite, demurely, "I am of a jealous turn of mind, and you offer me a perfect security. You are not handsome, nor brilliant. I do not think any woman but myself is the least likely to fall in love with you."

He lays his hand with an adoring gesture upon her golden head.

"My darling," he says, "all the loveliest women ever created would not be worth one curl of this little head to me."

"Ah!" she returns, with approving patronage, "a very proper frame of mind for a married man. I trust it will last. Now, dear, order the carriage, and come and choose me a bonnet at Madame Chiffon's."

Mignon and Kitty become friends at once. Lady Bergholt is delighted to have a friend of her own age and way of thinking, nor is she less pleased to be relieved of the constant attendance of Sir Tristram. No more of the Vatican, no more of the Capitol, no more cold hands and feet with standing about vast, vaulty palaces, staring with wearied vacant eyes from the dull pictures to Murray, and from Murray back to the dull pictures.

"A good Holy Family. A Holy Family. A boy in a red cap. A good Virgin and Child. Two large landscapes with figures. A Virgin and Child. A Holy Family. Portrait supposed to be Poggio Bracciolini. A fine male portrait. St. Sebastian. St. John preaching in the wilderness. Crucifixion of St. Peter. A Holy Family."

After Lady Clover's arrival, she resolutely refuses to enter church, palace, or picture-gallery again: she will hardly even be induced to drive round Rome's environs. Every day she calls for Kitty, or Kitty for her, and, beautifully apparelled, the two charming brides drive in the Pincio, listen to the band, and distract the hearts of the young Italians and English who congregate there and stare at them with no feigned admiration. Kitty is in point of real beauty far inferior to Mignon, but there is something so vivacious, so *piquante* and sparkling about her, that she comes in for no mean share of the general approbation. Kitty is clever in her way, too, and well informed: she speaks French perfectly. Mignon does not possess a single accomplishment, nor does she care to. Sir Tristram had diffidently suggested when they first came to Rome that she should take lessons in singing and French, but "my lady" repudiated the idea with scorn.

"There is no occasion for me to be clever," she remarked, magnificently: "it's all very well for plain women. Besides, I have always heard that men hate blue-stockings."

So Sir Tristram is fain to leave his lovely wife in her ignorance: she can talk like other women, for in these days elegancy and propriety of expression are not necessarily distinguishing characteristics of the conversation of people of birth.

Sir Josias (poor man! his godfathers and godmother were very hard upon him in giving him such a name)—Sir Josias's great delight was to take a quiet walk in the Pincio, and to watch, unobserved if possible, the carriage containing the two lovely women, one of whom was to his loyal heart the sweetest and fairest object in creation. Others might yield the apple to Mignon, but not Kitty's husband.

"She is very lovely, of course," he responded to Kitty's enthusiastic admiration of her friend; "but——"

"But me no buts," quoth Kitty, imperiously; "she is the loveliest creature *I* ever saw; she is the loveliest creature *you* ever saw. Come, say so directly!"

"But—you. May I not but that but?" asks her husband, with a quiet smile.

"In consideration of the unusual brilliancy of your repartee, I excuse you," replies Mrs. Kitty. "But don't let any one else hear you say so, or they will be persuading me to shut you up in a lunatic-asylum."

Sir Tristram does not often turn his steps to the Park: once or twice it has made him unconquerably melancholy to see Mignon so radiant away from him, nay, so much more radiant away from him. And it is absurd, he tells himself, impatiently, to see the two old husbands always running after the two young wives. Sir Josias is nearly ten years younger than Sir Tristram, though, except in age, the older man has every advantage. No, he lacks one for which he would exchange a good deal with the other. Sir Josias's wilful incomprehensible little wife is fond of him; and in his most sanguine moments *he* dares not lay the flattering unction to his soul that Mignon feels any affection for *him*. So he betakes himself to the Colosseum and falls into reveries about the dead and gone times when Rome was empress of the world, or to St. Peter's, or to the Vatican, where he spends most of his time in the Cortile di Belvedere. Sometimes he calls on old friends; but the most delightful moment of the day is that in which he runs up-stairs and finds Mignon sitting over the fire before she dresses for dinner. It is not always fraught with pleasure—it is a frightful position for a man, to be dying to make love to a woman, with the conviction that she will consider it a stupendous bore. The fact of being the fair one's husband and having the right only makes the position

more painful for a delicate-minded man like Sir Tristram. Mignon, not having a delicate mind, cannot of course be touched by his forbearance.

He is longing to get home, but his wife *must* see Naples, and they are to stay in Paris on the way back, to which she looks forward immensely on account of all the lovely things she intends to buy there.

"It will be so nice," she tells Kitty, "if we are there together. You know all the best places, and, as I can't talk French, you will do everything for me, won't you?"

And Kitty promises, nothing loath. Besides, she has *carte blanche* from her husband, and intends to be very magnificent in the coming season.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Besides, the knave is handsome, young, and hath all those requisites in him that folly and green minds look after."

Othello.

MIGNON and Kitty have become so inseparable that it is impossible for the indulgent husbands to think of parting them. So it is arranged that they shall all go to Naples together first, and then to Paris.

Mignon has lost much of her interest in Naples since some one told her that coral was not becoming to fair people,—her desire to go there having been stimulated by contemplated purchases in that delicate ware. Of Vesuvius and Pompeii she knows little and cares less. Still, being so near, it is the proper thing to go there. So the lovely young wives and their staid husbands set off together, and the same evening find themselves at a hotel on the Chiaja, facing the Bay of Naples. People cannot travel together without becoming acquainted with each other's little weaknesses: thus Kitty makes the discovery before very long that Lady Bergholt is rather selfish, and not quite so angelic as she looks; indeed, her maid has confided to Lady Clover's maid that she has once been called a fool, and once had her face slapped, on the severe provocation of pulling "my lady's" golden locks. Mignon wishes

Kitty would not be always making fun of everybody and everything. Still, the two are as fast friends as ever, and rarely apart. Brides of a few months are, as a rule, fond of being left *tête-à-tête* with their husbands, and are apt to be a little jealous of intruders, especially of their own sex; but this is not the case with the two in question, and they have a perfect security against any rivalry in each other in the small value they place on the conquest of their lords.

"Kitty," hazards Sir Josias one day, in his quiet way, "your friendship with Lady Bergholt is so very warm that I fear it will come to an untimely end."

"Not yet," replies Kitty, who is perched upon a table, nodding at him like some wise little bird.

"How long is it *warranted* to last?"

"How long?" (reflectively). "Oh, until we both take a fancy to the same man."

Sir Josias opens his eyes a little wider than usual.

"Oh, then you contemplate such a possibility?"

"Of course I do" (demurely). "Don't you?"

"I confess that contingency had not occurred to me," replies Sir Josias, with a shade of stiffness that makes the corners of his malicious little wife's mouth twitch.

"Well," proceeds Kitty, "here we are perfectly safe: she is not afraid of Sir Tristram falling in love with me, and I" (slyly) "have every confidence in you, dear; but in Paris, or at all events in London, we shall both have many amiable and handsome young men in our train, and ill luck may order it so that we shall both take a fancy to the same one. *Then* of course our friendship will come to an end."

"Kitty!" expostulates long-suffering Sir Josias, "I think you carry your love of joking a little too far."

"Joking!" repeats Kitty, calmly. "I never was more serious in my life. Pray, have you not told me a thousand times that I am the loveliest, the most charming creature in the world?"

Sir Josias is silent.

"Answer me directly, Jo, if you please" (with a little stamp). "Have you or have you not told me so?"

"And if I have been so foolish, what then?"

"Oh, you did not mean it, I suppose?"

"Yes, I did. But——"

"You know I hate that word," says Kitty, tyrannically. "Well, if I am so lovely, and if I am to go into society (I suppose you intend me to go into society?)——"

"Certainly."

"Do you not suppose that other men besides yourself will fall victims to my charms? Every one knows that *I* have no heart; Mignon has less still; but we have vanity," utters "my lady," superbly, "and some day our vanity will probably cause us to clash."

"Oh!" utters Sir Josias, relieved. "Still——"

"If anything, I dislike *still* more than *but*," interrupts Kitty. "Jo, dear."

"Well, darling?"

"Should you like to kiss me?" And she purses up her rosebud of a mouth in the most inviting manner.

Sir Josias is about to avail himself of this affectionate invitation, but he is never very quick in his movements. As he comes close up to her, she slips off the table, and, with a wicked little peal of laughter, escapes through the door.

They have *done* Naples, have been to the Museum, to the church of many steps, to the Opera, have inspected the coral-shops, have driven up and down the Chiaja and seen pretty Princess Marguerite, they have been to Sorrento, Herculaneum, Pompeii, have bought basketfuls of flowers from the Neapolitan flower-sellers, and been delighted by hearing Santa Lucia sung under their windows. The weather has been lovely: they have had ten days of golden sunshine and sapphire seas and skies. But their hearts are in Paris, the fair ones' hearts, at least, and the husbands have the consoling thought that there they will be near home, which both are beginning to long anxiously for. They are to return by Florence, Bologna, Genoa, and Nice: a friend of Sir Tristram's has offered to bring his yacht round from Naples to Genoa, and take their party from the latter place to Nice, wind and weather favoring. The elements are propitious, and they all agree that this is one of the most charming days of the whole tour. There is a sun that makes you think of an English June, though it is only the first week in February, the sky is "Italian," the waters blue and dancing, not dancing enough to give any one an uncomfortable sensation but the maids (maids have quite exceptional faculties of being sea-sick),

and the scenery is lovely. It is a charming drive along the Cornice road, with its alternate wild picturesqueness and rich cultivation, the bold precipitous cliffs lashed by surf, the great expanse of many-colored sea, blue, purple, rosy-hued, or emerald in the varying light, the ruined strongholds standing in bold relief from their rocky background, the narrow streets and sharp turns round which your *vetturino* loves, with a wild whoop, to send his team full gallop, and did it so happen that another carriage met yours at that particular angle, it would be difficult to show cause why you should not then and there be launched into eternity. And besides the wild grandeur of frowning rocks, of breakers, and of Saracen towers, there are groves of sad-colored olives and green pines, there are cacti and gigantic aloes, oleanders, citrons, myrtle, orange-trees and feathery palms. Sometimes you come across a little church peeping heavenwards out of a cluster of cypresses, sometimes a pretentious cathedral rears its head proudly from an ancient town; here you may see the remains of a Roman bridge, there the decayed palace of some once powerful Italian noble, whose very name is forgotten to-day. But still I incline more to the view from the sea; for, if you are not a victim to *mal de mer*, to what scene does not the sea lend beauty and grandeur, most of all the heaven-colored Mediterranean?—

> "O fair green-girdled mother of mine,
> Sea that art clothed with the sun and the rain."

So sings our grandest poet of to-day. What pity that, with his transcendent genius, his divine gift, he has used it so that if one quotes his exquisite lines one hesitates to name their author!

From the deck of the Merveilleuse, Mignon contemplates the lovely panorama, whilst the yacht's owner watches her furtively and thinks "Idalian Aphrodite" herself could not have been more dangerously fair. "What luck some men have!" he ejaculates, the object of his envy being at this moment Sir Tristram. Mignon is looking at the range of mountains, now and again snow-capped, at the wooded hills, the cliffs crimson and purple in the sunshine, the many-tongued sea, oh, so blue, so blue, lapping against their base, and creeping up the bays to the feet of little villages nestling against a background of olives and pines, with here and there a church

standing erect, whose faint call to prayer is borne to them over the glittering water, and the gloomy frowning towers that once were direly needed against the lawless crews who sailed under the black flag. Even Mignon, with so narrow a soul for beauty, finds the scene passing fair; and Kitty is so enthralled that she is almost silent.

It is moonlight when they are put on shore at Nice. Four days later they are in Paris. Mignon is delighted, enchanted: no matter how her companions croak and bemoan the alterations since the war. She looks out of her room in the Hôtel Bristol on the Place Vendôme: how should she be shocked by the absence of the grand column that she never knew? the Tuileries is a picturesque ruin to her, not a heart-breaking sight, as heart-breaking almost to English as to French eyes; the grievous change in the Bois cannot affect one who knew it not in the days of its glory. There are the shops,—the big diamonds and pearls in the Rue de la Paix, the fabulous bonbons, the bouquets of exquisite flowers thrice, nay, five times the size of English bouquets, the silversmiths' windows piled up with what looks at a little distance like thousands of silver eggs, but proves to be the bowls of myriad spoons, the fan-, glove-, lace-shops, the wonders of the Palais Royal. "My lady," too, has a taste for dainty dishes, and enjoys extremely the delicious little dinners at restaurants of note. The fact that dinners there since the war cost a small fortune is also, or would be if she knew it, a matter of perfect indifference to her, as, with her accession to wealth, her ideas have expanded until they are nothing less than magnificent. Sir Tristram is rich and generous: it has not occurred to him yet to question any fancy of Mignon's, if its gratification only depends upon money.

They have been in Paris only three days. Kitty and Mignon are driving up the Champs Elysées towards the Bois, when suddenly Lady Clover utters an exclamation and calls to the coachman to stop.

"Raymond, by all that's wonderful!" she cries, as the carriage stops, and that very handsome young man disengages his arm from another man's and comes towards her.

"Kitty, by all that's charming!" he replies, taking off his hat. "I beg ten thousand pardons, Lady Clover——"

Therewith his eyes wander to her companion, and as he

recognizes the lovely face a slight color deepens in his own, a faint pink responds to it from Mignon's.

"Lady Bergholt, Mr. L'Estrange—I am not sure if you know each other," exclaims Kitty. "Have you met before?"

"Once," he answers, with a meaning smile; and the color deepens still more on Mignon's peach-like cheek.

"What are you doing? Who are you with? Would you not like to come with us?" asks Lady Clover in a breath.

"I should, immensely—oh, I can leave him. We were only having a stroll," answers Raymond, in inverse order to the questions propounded; and thereupon, with the inconsiderateness that Englishmen are wont to exhibit to one another, and which is never resented when there is a lady in the case, Raymond mounts into the carriage as the servant opens the door for him, and gives an unceremonious nod over his shoulder to the friend who is lounging in the distance, trying to look unconscious, and wondering who the deuce those two lovely women are who looked so pleased to see L'Estrange.

As Raymond sits opposite to Lady Bergholt, three lines of his favorite poet come to his mind:

> "Filled full with life to the eyes and hair,
> As a rose is fulfilled to the roseleaf tips
> With splendid summer and perfume and pride."

"And pray, sir," cries Kitty, "what brings you here, when you ought to be hunting the wily fox?"

"I got a fall a fortnight ago," he answers, "and the brute rolled on my leg. No bones broken, but I shan't be able to grip a horse again this season. So there was nothing for it but London or Paris."

"Poor boy!" says Lady Clover, patronizingly. "Well, what's the news? What have you been doing ever since October? I have often pictured you to myself broken-hearted since I married!"

"So I was; so I am still,—inconsolable. The only thing that has at all raised my spirits has been thinking how frightfully Sir Josias must be boring you."

"Not in the least. He is a most amusing companion," retorts Kitty, mendaciously. "And *so* good-tempered. We have never had a word,—not once; and travelling is the most trying ordeal for husbands and wives that I can imagine. My

dear Raymond, picture to yourself what *we* should have been after three months' foreign travel together."

Raymond and Kitty were contemporaries in petticoats: so this *franchise* may be considered pardonable.

"My dear, we should have adored each other as at the first day," returns Raymond, imperturbably. "Pray don't give Lady Bergholt any unfair impressions about me: the sweetness of my temper is a proverb in our part of the country."

"Then don't risk it by marrying."

"I don't intend to. I never saw a woman I wanted to marry,—present company of course excepted."

He is speaking to Kitty, but his eyes steal one furtive glance at Mignon.

"People who tell stories ought to have good memories," cries Lady Clover. "Why, it is not two years since you were button-holing every one about your hopeless passion for Mrs. Stratheden."

"Ah, yes," he returns; "that is true: thanks for reminding me. I have had a good many companions in woe there. She has another broken heart to answer for since I last saw you. By the way, you remember my friend Vyner's accident?"

"When Mrs. Stratheden behaved with such heroism? Of course he fell in love with her. Why, my dear Raymond, I could have told you that would happen at the time," says Kitty, with a little air of superior wisdom. "Well, I suppose his heart is mended again by now,—like yours."

"Indeed it is not," answers Raymond. "I never saw a fellow take a thing so to heart. He has lost about two stone, and doesn't seem to care for anything that he used to. He rides awfully hard, too: sometimes I think he wants to break his neck."

"Who *is* this fascinating Mrs. Stratheden?" asks Lady Bergholt, with an unconscious touch of pique. Somehow, it jars upon her to hear other women praised.

"Who *is* she?" repeats Raymond. "I was going to say the most charming woman in the world. I will say *almost* the most charming." And his eyes accentuate his meaning.

They are making the "tour du lac," going, as is the custom, at a foot-pace. Raymond is conscious of the attention excited by his fair *vis-à-vis:* it pleases his vanity to be seen in company with two lovely, perfectly-dressed women, for women I

must by courtesy call these two girls, both of whom are only just eighteen. Mr. L'Estrange comes in for a considerable share of attention from the fair, but he has no eyes for any but the ones he is with.

At the door of their hotel they meet the two husbands. Sir Tristram greets Raymond heartily, and asks him to dine with them. Sir Josias treats him with undemonstrative politeness.

"Pray, my dear," he asks his wife, a little later, "do you begin to feel your friendship for Lady Bergholt on the wane yet?"

Clever little Kitty understands him at once.

"Why, you goose," she says, "I look upon Raymond as my brother."

"Then you have no objection to his falling in love with your friend?"

"Not the slightest."

"That is fortunate," observes Sir Josias, dryly.

"It will be 'diamond cut diamond,'" laughs Kitty. "I don't know which has the least heart or the most vanity."

Raymond L'Estrange is susceptible; his principles have been slightly impaired by two seasons in London, and by a course of reading which, however interesting and instructive, is hardly wholesome for a very young man. Alfred de Musset and Swinburne he swears by; Rousseau, Balzac, Gauthier, Feydeau, and Arsène Houssaye he has read with avidity; from Rochefoucauld and Lord Chesterfield he has culled some useful hints: it is not therefore to be supposed that, when he finds himself in danger of becoming deeply interested in his friend's wife, he should hasten to put the sea or some impossible distance between her and himself. On the contrary, he passes as much time as possible in her company, and the fair one is eminently gratified by his attentions. Raymond gives the whole party a recherché little dinner at the Café Anglais; he takes a box for them to see Schneider; he sends to both ladies the most exquisite bouquets.

"My dear Raymond," says wicked Kitty one day when they are alone, "what a fortune these little attentions to me are costing you! I really did not know you were still so fond of me. Pray be careful not to excite poor Sir Jo's suspicions. It is very prudent, though, of you always to treat Mignon in the same way, and makes a most excellent blind."

Raymond's handsome mouth curves into a smile.

"What a witch you are, Kitty! But really she is adorable, is she not? What an awful shame her marrying a man so much older than herself! I'm awfully fond of Sir Tristram: he's a thundering good fellow: still, thirty years is a horrible, an unnatural disparity. Oh, I beg your pardon, I forgot."

"You need not beg *my* pardon," retorts Lady Clover, with some tartness. "Jo is only nineteen years and eleven months older than I am; and I would not have married a young man for the world. You think of nothing but yourselves, and are as fickle as—as——"

"A woman?" suggests Raymond.

"No, sir, not at all. Women are not fickle: they know their own minds, and once they choose a man, if they are worth anything, they stick to him,—which you young men don't."

"Charming for Sir Josias!" sneers Raymond. "You and Lady Bergholt seem tremendous friends. Does she share your sentiments?"

"If she does not, she ought to. She owes everything to Sir Tristram."

"I don't think there is much obligation," retorts Raymond. "She gives him her exquisite self in return."

Kitty makes a little scornful gesture. Looking at it from a woman's point of view, she thinks the return a very indifferent one.

"I see you are very far gone," she remarks; "but I am happy to tell you, my dear, that you are wasting your time. If I were not sure of it, I should not think it right to encourage you by allowing you to go about everywhere with us."

This, delivered with an air, by a little arch flirt of eighteen, is too much for Raymond's gravity; and he laughs outright.

"May Lady Clover long practise what she preaches!" he says.

Meantime, Sir Tristram has not been unobservant of the effect produced by his wife on Raymond. To say he has not felt a pang of jealousy at seeing these two handsome heads whispering together, would be to say what every one would feel to be an absurdity. But he has said this to himself:

"She is beautiful: no man can look upon her without feeling admiration, perhaps love for her. I must make up my

mind either to shut her up and let no one see her, and in so doing secure our mutual wretchedness and perhaps drive her into infidelity. The other course is to put no restraint upon her,—to let her have as much admiration and enjoyment as her own beauty and my money can command. I think" (sighing), "ambition is a stronger motive power in her than love, and in the long run it will be better for me if it is so. Raymond is the first; but am I to suppose he will be the last? How Fred will gird at me for my folly! I suppose I have been a fool; but I don't know that if I could, I would undo the work of the last six months."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"The mare with a flowing tail composed an eighth species of woman. These are they who have little regard for their husbands; who pass away their time in dressing, bathing, and perfuming; who throw their hair into the nicest curls, and trick it up with the fairest flowers and garlands. A woman of this species is a very pretty thing for a stranger to look upon, but very detrimental to the owner, unless he be a king or prince, who takes a fancy to such a toy."

SIMONIDES.

It is the first week in May. The fashionable papers have duly chronicled that Sir Tristram and Lady Bergholt have arrived at No. — Eaton Square for the season. They have spent the last two months at The Warren, which has been transformed into a little paradise. Sir Tristram thoroughly enjoys an English spring in the country after his long absence, but Mignon, who has spent nearly every spring of her life in sight of the hills and dales and woods her lord finds so charming, is impatient to begin her life in London. Sir Tristram has decided that she is not to see Bergholt until after the season, by which time the various alterations he has planned will be completed and a proper staff of servants sent down. My lady has been very gracious to her mother and sisters, and even to her father. She no longer feels any grudge against him now that her marriage has turned out so well. Still, that

is no thanks to him, she tells herself. At her husband's suggestion, she has brought each member of the family a handsome present from abroad, not forgetting the old housekeeper, her former nurse.

Mignon is very sweet and gracious to every one: her foot is on the necks of her people: they vie with each other in attentions and care for her. At first this triumphant homecoming is immensely gratifying to her ladyship, but she soon wearies of it after she has exhibited her lovely toilettes, her jewels, the treasures she has collected in her travels. There is no Cascine, no Pincio, no Chiaja, no Bois, in which to display her beauty and her fine clothes of an afternoon; she misses the admiration of many eyes, and finds driving up and down steep hills and looking at lovely views extremely wearisome and monotonous, in spite of her handsome carriage and liveries. She yawns, reads countless novels, and is perpetually entreating her husband to take her to London when he goes up for the day on business; but he puts her off with excuses: the truth is, he does not want her to be seen until she breaks with fitting state upon the London world in all her loveliness. She longs after Kitty, who is at home at Elmor, a charming old place which Sir Josias's father bought twenty years ago from a bankrupt nobleman. Mignon wishes she were at Bergholt: she would be near Kitty and—Mr. L'Estrange. It would be pleasant having him to come in and chat with and flatter her. Here there is literally no one: even poor Oswald Carey has gone off to India,—Oswald, her first victim.

"Pooh!" thinks Mignon: "he was nothing to be proud of!"

At Easter, Gerry comes to The Warren, looking so handsome and in such spirits, so grateful to Sir Tristram, so full of love and admiration for his beautiful sister. "Oh, Yonnie! what a clipper you have grown!" he says. "How you will take the shine out of some of them this season!" He asks a thousand questions: who is to present her; what she will wear; if she is to have a box at the Opera. Mignon has not thought about the Opera, and forthwith asks the question of Sir Tristram: she has not the slightest *honte*, true or false, in asking for anything she fancies.

"My darling, you would find it a great bore. You shall have a box as often as you care to go, but we shall probably

dine out a good deal, and it is hardly worth while taking one so late in the opera season. And I don't think you are very enthusiastic about music. Don't you remember how you yawned at the Opera in Naples?"

"Oh, that was different," pouts Mignon. "There were no people and no dresses there one cared to see."

"Well, my love, if you care as much for it as you think you will, I promise you a box for next season."

The subject drops; but Mignon feels rather aggrieved. In her idea it is an important part in the rôle of a *grande dame* to have her box at the Opera.

The two dull months are over now,—months that have been glorious with sunshine, and whose sudden showers have turned every twig into a jewelled sceptre, months when the birds have poured their thrilling music from every bush and shrub and tree, months when Nature has sown every bank and hedge-row with many-colored wild flowers, and, lavish of her sweets, her beauties, her melodies, has, in the joy of her perennial youth, shared them freely with her lovers. But Mignon is not one of these.

Sir Tristram and Lady Bergholt have arrived in town. Mignon is in a state of mind that halts between rapture and terror: she is to be presented next week. Rapture, because she is to be presented by a duchess, because the great man-milliner, having himself seen her and observed her beauty in Paris, has confectioned her the loveliest presentation-toilette that even his artistic mind is capable of: it is of the sheeniest satin, the most ethereal tulle, the most graceful, pure white ostrich-feathers, and so exquisitely draped and arranged one might imagine that the mantle of a Greek sculptor had fallen on the shoulders of Mr. Z. Sir Tristram has given her a parure of diamonds, for which Mignon has kissed him voluntarily the first time in her life. He feels himself amply repaid. So much for my lady's rapture. Now for her terror. She is entirely ignorant how to acquit herself in the presence of royalty. It is very easy for her husband to say, "But, my love, it is the simplest thing in the world. You give your card to the Lord Chamberlain, and then you curtsy and kiss her Majesty's hand, curtsy to the princesses, and get out of the way as soon as you can." Mignon would like to call in the assistance of Miss Leonora Geary; but her husband laughs at her. "Wait till Kitty

comes," he says: "if I have not told you enough, she will be able to give you every *renseignement.*"

"What is that?" asks Mignon.

"I beg your pardon, my dear. That is a French word, rather expressive, I think, meaning information, particular. By the way, I wish you spoke French like Kitty: it is so desirable for a woman who goes much into society. You know, darling, it is not too late yet."

Mignon "tiptilts" her nose (charming euphemism, into which the poet-laureate has transmuted a vulgar idiom). She has a rooted opinion that knowledge detracts from beauty, and has no ambition to put any more learning into her lovely head than is at present there.

Kitty comes to the rescue. She arrives in town three days after Mignon, who feels a little jealous because her friend has a town house of her own. The meeting is most affectionate. Lady Clover has come to lunch in Eaton Square, and need I say that immediately afterwards there is a display of the importation from Paris?

"I expect to die of spleen when I see your court dress," says Kitty. "I saw that wretch Z. took an especial interest in you. I was consigned to his ladies-in-waiting without a look. Still, my dress is very pretty; though I dare say I shall despise it when I have seen yours."

When it is unfolded, she looks at it with clasped hands, and such an expression in her eyes as a sculptor might wear looking for the first time upon the statue of which Byron wrote:

> "All that ideal beauty ever blessed
> The mind with in its most unearthly mood,
> When each conception was a heavenly guest,—
> A ray of immortality."

Certes Mrs. Kitty never stood with bated breath and rapt eyes over the Apollo Belvedere as she is standing now.

"What a shame!" she utters, at last, "when you are so lovely already!"

No man could have paid Mignon such a compliment. The "realized dream" of Mr. Z. having been put away, and the friends left alone, Mignon enters eagerly upon the subject of her presentation.

"Oh, Kitty, do please tell me exactly what to do. Sir Tristram has only given me the vaguest idea."

"Well, my dear, first and foremost, you are not to rub your nose on her Majesty's hand."

"As if I should!" utters Mignon, aggrieved.

"You will be very clever if you don't, without a great deal of practice. It sounds delightfully easy to kiss any one's hand; but just try it under the attendant circumstances. Put your arm out nearly a yard in front of your body, curtsy as low as you do in the Lancers, and kiss the Queen's hand at the same time,—this with four yards' length of satin trailing behind you, a bouquet, a handkerchief, and a glove (be sure you don't forget to take your glove off) in the other hand, and the most awful feeling of nervousness you ever experienced in your life,—and if you acquit yourself to your own satisfaction without a great deal of practice, you will be more than mortal. When I think what her Majesty must suffer from the untrained osculations of Mesdames Jones, Brown, and Robinson!" And wicked Kitty laughs a ringing peal. "Come now, begin! I will be the Queen." And Lady Clover takes up a position majestically at the top of the room. Mignon goes energetically through her drill. Sir Tristram, hearing the sound of his wife's musical laughter, comes in and finds the lesson proceeding.

The day arrives. The two brides are to meet at the Palace, for it is not to be supposed they are going to crush their lovely dresses by sitting in one carriage. Besides, each wishes to display her handsome carriage and liveries. If they have sold themselves, they wish the world to know that they have fetched a good price.

Mignon looks—lovely? O poor hackneyed word, that has to do duty for the fairest fair, and for many ordinary things besides, let me hasten to find adverbs wherewith to enrich you. Supremely, exquisitely, transcendently lovely. Yet I am not satisfied.

Her whole family have come to see her dressed. Mignon thought it would be rather a bore; but Sir Tristram made a point of inviting them. Even they, in whose sight she has lived all her life, marvel at her. Sir Tristram feels the proudest man in England as he squeezes himself into an infinitesimal space in the carriage, not to endanger the clouds that surround his divinity. It is only one o'clock when they take their place in the rank; but it is a lovely day, and neither

the occupants of the carriages nor the horses are likely to take cold. The sun shines upon Mignon and her diamonds, but even a May sun at noonday can find no flaw or speck in that perfect skin.

> "Nothing frayed
> The sun's large kiss on the luxurious hair.
> Her beauty was new color to the air,
> And music to the silent many birds.
> Love was an-hungered for some perfect words
> To praise her with."

The British public is long-suffering, but it is not well bred. It thinks no shame to stare and gape round the carriage of a beautiful woman or a celebrity, to make its remarks in a distinctly audible voice, nay, even to point with its finger. "Oh, my! Polly, look 'ere! 'Ere's a lovely young lady! Well, I never! she beats the lot! Look at her dimins! I suppose the gent's her pa."

It is not on account of the last remark that Sir Tristram asks Mignon whether she will like the blinds down, for there is a regular mob round the carriage; but Lady Bergholt declines, probably on the principle that "it pleases them and doesn't hurt her."

Kitty is awaiting her friend impatiently in the uncloaking-room. She, too, looks charming; but beside Mignon she is only like a star to the moon.

"Come, my dear, we shall be frightfully late!" she cries, impatiently; and Mignon follows her, looking like a beautiful swan *in the water*, not "on a turnpike road." She is fairly dazzled. The uniforms, the beef-eaters, the gentlemen-at-arms, the diamonded dowagers, present to her unaccustomed eyes so gorgeous a kaleidoscope that her brain is in a whirl: she hardly hears the gay nonsense Lady Clover is whispering to her.

"Look at poor Jo! did you ever see such a figure? Poor dear! he has not had his uniform on lately, and has got fat in the mean time. There was not time to have it let out, and it took two men to button it. I expect to hear it burst with a loud report every moment: he is nearly black in the face now. I have offended his mother for life. She expected to present me, though she has not been to Court for years, and was going to make an effort on my account. I don't want to be

unkind, but really Jo and his mother together would have been too much. Picture to yourself, my dear, a mother-in-law in brown moiré and cork-screw ringlets, and collar-bones that remind you of a shoulder of mutton after a large family has dined off it. Jo was rather hurt, but he is so sensible. I said to him, 'Don't you think, dear, after calm and dispassionate reflection, that it is quite sufficient trial for me to go with you in the uniform of a colonel of volunteers, without the maternal moiré and ringlets and collar-bones?' He saw it at once. There" (nodding and smiling to some one in the distance), "there is Lady De Vyne, who presents me: is she not magnificent-looking? There is Raymond, too, in attendance upon his mother. How handsome he looks in his yeomanry dress! she makes a point of coming once in three years, and it always knocks her up for a month."

"Who is that elegant woman so exquisitely dressed?" asks Lady Bergholt, as Kitty kisses the tips of her fingers to a lady in the distance.

"That is Mrs. Stratheden. No matter where she goes, she is nearly always the most distinguée and the best-dressed woman in the room."

Mignon feels a shade disappointed. She has taken a sort of dislike to Olga without knowing her, and feels a desire to depreciate her: it is the impossibility of doing this that chagrins her.

But she soon recovers her equanimity. All eyes within range are turned upon her; people are asking who she is; there is not the slightest doubt that amidst that brilliant throng she is the undisputed belle. Raymond is dying to get to her; but there is a wall of tulle, satin, brocade, and diamonds between them. His handsome face wears a decided frown, and he is inclined to be pettish with his poor mother.

"It is going to be a frightful crush," whispers Kitty, looking over her shoulder and seeing the gentleman-at-arms at the last barrier courteously but firmly refusing admission to a bevy of fair ones intent upon getting into the already crowded rooms. "The room before the throne-room will be a bear-garden. I tremble for our dresses!" And, when she gets there, Mignon finds, to her cost, that a titled and well-born crowd, arrayed in purple and fine linen, can push as hard and get as hot as a crowd consisting of more vulgar elements, and not keep their

tempers half so well, either. Meantime, during the long hours of waiting, she amuses herself by looking about her, at the pictures, the brocade hangings, out into the garden; but she is getting impatient and pale with nervousness. Three o'clock strikes; the Queen, with the punctuality that is the courtesy of royalty, has taken up her position; there is a short hush of excited expectancy whilst the privileged few who have the entrée are sailing leisurely into the throne-room, without confusion or crowding, very much as if they were going in to dinner. Now the ropes are withdrawn: there is a rush forward, and the brilliant stream, like pent-up water let loose, floods through the open space, and Mignon and Kitty are swept along with it. There is really plenty of room in those spacious saloons, if the fair throng would take it quietly; but each one is afraid of missing her Majesty, and treads eagerly upon the satin heels in front. Mignon feels her exquisite dress that was like a puff of thistle-down an hour ago squeezed and crushed around her, herself jostled with scant ceremony, and is almost ready to cry with mortification.

"Now," says Kitty, as they reach the corridor that precedes the throne-room, "follow me, and do as I do. Don't look at yourself in the glass on the left, because the men will be looking at you from the other side. And be sure you don't tread on my train."

With these injunctions, she lets down her train for the pages to arrange, and sweeps on. Calm, self-possessed Mignon shivers like an aspen as the Lord Chamberlain reads her name. She is conscious of an encouraging smile from a gracious lady, she just manages to kiss the royal hand, and then, oblivious of curtsies to the princesses, and of the injunction not to turn her back upon them, she turns and flies, whilst an elderly gentleman rushes breathlessly after her with her train. She is immediately joined by Sir Tristram, who, having appeared at the levée two days before, has only come in attendance upon his lovely wife. Mignon leans upon his arm with a delightful feeling of protection quite new to her; then Raymond comes up, and a host of her husband's friends are asking to be introduced to her, and she comes to the conclusion that it is most delightful—when it is all over.

Mrs. Stratheden approaches. She is very cordial, without being gushing. She thinks Lady Bergholt almost the love-

liest creature she has ever seen; and there is no one more heartily appreciative of beauty in her own sex than Olga.

"I want you and Sir Tristram to dine with me unceremoniously to-morrow," she says to Mignon, "if you are disengaged. Lady Clover and her husband and Raymond and Mrs. L'Estrange have promised to come. We shall be quite a Blankshire party."

Mignon, without even consulting Sir Tristram by a glance, answers that they are happy to accept, but in a tone so glacial that Mrs. Stratheden is chilled, and Sir Tristram feels both surprised and annoyed. Lady Bergholt turns to speak to Raymond, in a manner that seems to intimate, "The audience is at an end," and Olga is soon the centre of a more appreciative crowd.

"Is she not lovely?" Raymond asks, with enthusiasm, of Mrs. Stratheden, a little later; and Olga replies,—

"Most lovely."

"*But?*" says Raymond. "I thought your tone implied a but."

"On the contrary," answers Olga. "There can be no but in the matter. She is almost, if not quite, the most lovely creature I ever saw."

"Mignon," says Sir Tristram, as they are rolling swiftly homewards, "I am sure you did not intend it, but your manner to Mrs. Stratheden was not very gracious."

"Really?" utters Mignon, coldly.

"She is one of the greatest friends I have," pursues Sir Tristram,—"the last person in the world I should wish you to be cool to."

Lady Bergholt does not reply. Already even, and despite her own transcendent beauty, she is jealous of Olga.

CHAPTER XIX.

"Let no flower of the spring pass by us. Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they be withered."

Wisdom of Solomon.

THE gates have swung open for Mignon, and she has entered the land of enchantment. This time last year she was a little rustic in a cotton gown and a straw hat, lying on the daisied grass under a big tree, and ambitioning nothing more than the undivided possession of her neighbor's strawberries, and now she is a queen of society, one of the most beautiful, most admired women in London. She plunges eagerly into the vortex: the whirl of it leaves her not a moment to think: it is all novelty, excitement, triumph. In the morning, if she is not engaged with dressmakers and milliners, she sits in the Row; thence she goes to a luncheon-party or has friends at home, thence shopping or to a reception or concert, then for a turn in the Park, then home to dress for a dinner-party or the Opera, then to one or more balls, then home, tired out, to sleep soundly until ten o'clock next morning. Sir Tristram has a large acquaintance; he has always been popular; and now, having a lovely wife who is very much the fashion, invitations pour in upon them thick and fast. Mignon has hardly time to exchange a word with her husband,—a circumstance that in no wise afflicts her. She has even left off asking him if she may have this or that thing she fancies, but gives herself *carte blanche* for her most extravagant whims. Although he goes with her to every entertainment, she is surrounded by a crowd of other men, and if alone with him for a moment she takes the opportunity to shut her lips and eyes, to recruit herself from the incessant strain upon them.

She no longer regrets the box at the Opera; she only cares to go on Saturday nights, and then the music bores her, though it is pleasant to sit in front of the box and have three-fourths of the glasses in the house directed at her, and to be visited between the acts by her most fashionable men friends. Sir Tristram is merged into Lady Bergholt's husband: he is

the proprietor of a lovely woman, and is therefore supposed to be satisfied with the fact, and expected to make way for every other man who wants to talk to or make love to her. My lady accepts all the adulation offered her as a tribute due to her charms. If a man becomes, or pretends to become, serious, she laughs in his face with bewitching impertinence, and as likely as not makes open fun of him to his friends,—any exposition of the tender passion being to her only matter for ridicule. She likes to be adored, she prefers a baronet to a commoner, and a lord to a baronet, but as to devoting herself particularly to one man, to the prejudice and alienation of others, such a thing is not to be thought of. Mignon's delight is to have a crowd round her, each vying with the other for her smiles, whilst other women look on, half enviously, half admiringly. Men who boast that they "never waste their time" are fain to detach themselves from her train. But not to run after a woman who is the rage, is a sacrifice of vanity that these sheep of fashion, with whom it is a tradition to follow their leader, are incapable of.

Raymond, who had dreamed dreams and seen visions of a romantic passion, terminating in "the world well lost" for one, if not both, is goaded into madness by Mignon's treatment of him. It is almost a death-blow to his vanity to know that he has only been a *pis-aller*, to find himself treated with utter indifference, to have his smiles, his frowns, his sulks, the absences with which he punishes himself in the hope of punishing her, apparently unnoticed by the object of his passion. If he is sentimentally inclined, Lady Bergholt laughs him to scorn,—perhaps holds him up to public ridicule; if he is moody and cross, she yawns and tells him openly that he is an insufferable nuisance. A thousand times a week he resolves never to see or speak to her again, but finds himself totally unable to keep his vow. If ever there was a woman fitted to revenge the wrongs of her sex on the other, it is Mignon. She makes many friends among women, from the remorseless snubs she gives to men: "they can't really like her, when she says such atrocious things to them," her fair friends think.

It is a June morning. Lady Bergholt is tired of sitting in state in her carriage: there is not a particle of shade from the ardent rays of the sun, and—my lady rather wishes to

exhibit a very ethereal toilette of *gaze de Chambéry* and Valenciennes that only arrived from Paris last night. Kitty, looking lovely on a spirited little bay, has gone down the Row, and Mrs. Stratheden, perfectly turned out as usual, and as pale and cool as if there was no blazing sun overhead, has stopped a moment in passing.

"I wish I rode! it's a great shame I haven't a horse," says Mignon to her husband, with a pout.

"As soon as you can ride, my darling, you shall have one," he replies; "but you would not like to practise here, and you are not up early enough in the morning to ride before the crowd comes. When we get to Bergholt you shall begin; but people don't ride like Kitty and Olga in a day."

"Olga!" repeats Mignon, "tiptilting" her nose in a way not unusual to her: "you seem to be on very familiar terms with her." Like many women who allow themselves very great latitude with men, Lady Bergholt resents the slightest familiarity between her husband and a woman.

"My dear child, I knew her when she was in short frocks."

"That must have been some time ago," sneers Mignon, longing to disparage, but finding it difficult. "Olga! such an outlandish name, too!"

Sir Tristram smiles mischievously.

"'People who live in glass houses,' you know," he says. "Of the two I am afraid your name would carry off the palm for outlandishness."

Mignon reddens at having fallen into her own pit.

"Every one else has ponies," she remarks, discontentedly.

"Well, you shall learn to drive too at Bergholt," says her doting husband, indulging himself with a lover-like thought of the pleasure it will give him to teach her. "But on a hot morning to hold pulling horses and sit in a broiling sun is not, you would find, the most agreeable pastime in the world, charming as the combined effect of thoroughbred steppers and a lovely charioteer may be."

"It is broiling enough sitting here," says Mignon, whose serenity is evidently somewhat ruffled this morning, I imagine because Lord Threestars has passed without stopping to speak to her. "Let us get out and sit under a tree."

So they descend from the barouche, and my lady sweeps her gauze and laces down the dusty path. She attracts great

attention, and would still more, only, unfortunately, she happens to be walking behind an actress more noted for her toilettes and jewels than for her dramatic talent.

It is not long before Lord Threestars joins them.

"Simply perfect! Z.'s last?" he whispers, knowing that a compliment to her dress is, if anything, more esteemed by a woman than one to herself. "By the way, are you going to the Queen's ball to-night?"

"Of course," answers Mignon, with not very well feigned nonchalance; and Sir Tristram winces. He knows what a man like Lord Threestars is likely to think of her affectations of *grande dame*,—affectations which, being evolved from the inner consciousness of one not born to the purple, must of necessity be unlike what they would simulate.

"I shall not ask you to dance," pursues Lord Threestars. "Dancing there is next to impossible, and would only crush your beautiful dress—of course you will be beautifully dressed, as you always are; but, if you will allow me, I will do cicerone, and show you everybody and everything."

Mignon graciously accepts, though she is a little disappointed at the prospect of not dancing. This ball has been her fondest aspiration: ever since she received the card with the magic words, "The Lord Chamberlain is commanded by the Queen to invite Sir Tristram and Lady Bergholt," etc., etc., she has been in a state of intense mental excitement, which she has carefully endeavored to suppress. To show exultation or mortification in the *beau monde* is to show a lack of breeding: thus much Mignon has learned: feign joy or feign sorrow if thou wilt, but never let the real feelings of thy heart be known, lest thy friends triumph over or make a mock at thee.

The longed-for time arrives. Mignon's heart beats, the hand that rests on her husband's arm trembles with excitement, as they thread their way along the crowded corridor to the ball-room. It is a dazzling sight for a novice, the blaze of diamonds, the rich and varied uniforms, the distinguished-looking men, the well-born, well-dressed women. There are exceptions; but I can think of no other time and place where so much of birth, good looks, and distinction are congregated together.

Lord Threestars meets them at the door, and Mignon transfers her hand to his arm.

"How late you are!" he whispers. "I thought you were never coming."

They struggle through the crowd with none the less difficulty because of the aristocratic elements which compose it, and make for the upper end of the room.

"Extraordinary," says Lord Threestars, "that, not wanting to dance, and with half a dozen other charming rooms to sit in, every one will crush in here."

From the elevated position to which he conducts her, Mignon has the pleasure of making a minute and searching inspection of the royal party with the most gracious and charming princess in the world in their midst, she has an undisturbed view of the Scotch reel performed in front of the daïs after supper, and, later on, she watches with immense interest the princess dancing like an ordinary mortal and evidently enjoying it too.

"Now," says Lord Threestars, with a sigh of relief, "I have kept my promise and shown you everything; now give me my reward and let us go and sit down quietly for a little while."

Mignon complies, and they wend their way to one of the handsome, deserted rooms,—deserted save for a stray couple flirting here and there in a corner. But she prefers being before the public, and likes much better to be seen leaning on Lord Threestars' arm among the crowd than to be sitting *tête-à-tête* with him in a comparatively empty room. Still, she wishes to make herself agreeable, and wreathes her face into smiles as he does his best to entertain her with the small talk of the day.

Mignon, though she objects to the trouble of taking French and singing lessons, is an apt scholar, and has picked up the jargon of society without effort. She is able to talk of "high life and high-lived company, with other fashionable topics, such as pictures, taste, Shakspeare, and the musical glasses." The three first-named have probably never gone out of vogue since that oft-quoted sentence was written: pictures, whether the public are in raptures over Gainsborough, Reynolds, Sir Edwin, or Millais, old masters or promising young ones; taste, through its changes from powder and hoops to coal-scuttles and the scantiest garments allowed by a very liberal-minded decency, back again to hoops without powder and clinging garments unaccompanied by coal-scuttles; Shakspeare, whether

expounded by Kemble, Kean, Fechter, Salvini, Rossi, or Irving. The musical glasses have had many substitutes, too numerous to attempt to chronicle: in the year of Mignon's début polo did duty for them, since then it has been skating-rinks, and last year it took the novel form of a coffin-show. Curious study for the philosopher! a duke opens his grounds for the display of be-ribboned, be-flowered wicker baskets, and, lo! the fashionable and the curious, who hate the name and thought of death, who shudder with terror and loathing when brought even into momentary contact with it, snatch a moment from their frivolous pursuits to stare and chatter and jest over the strange show. I wonder if any of them saw, instead of the wreaths and ribbons, the fair faces and the smiles, a corruption so horrible as to sicken the strongest man, and the loathsome worms gliding in and out between the wicker-work? That is what I should have seen; and so I stayed away. If Juvenal had lived in the present day, he might, along with many of the vices he lashed in his own time, have had something to say about skating in the dog-days and flocking to a coffin-show. Baby-shows, barmaid-shows, seem a trifle extravagant in idea, but what are they to a coffin-show?

From a queen's ball to a coffin, what a hideous digression! I humbly apologize to the reader for having carried him from a pleasant thought to a ghastly one, and with all speed I will hie me back.

"You *will* drive down to Lillie Bridge on Saturday, won't you?" Lord Threestars is entreating. "I will send you tickets."

"Perhaps," answers Mignon, who is clever enough not to make her favors too cheap.

"But promise, and then I shall feel happy."

"Women's promises are not to be relied on, you know," Mignon answers, with a saucy laugh.

"Yours are, I am sure," murmurs my lord, sentimentally.

"I am very hungry," remarks Lady Bergholt, irreverently, "and you have not asked me to have any supper."

"Because I knew there would not be a chance until the dowagers were appeased. Come now" (rising and giving her his arm).

Lord Threestars is slightly fastidious: that so lovely a creature as Lady Bergholt should not be superior to the gross sensation of hunger is displeasing to him; when he sees that

young lady's remarkably healthy appetite, his soul is troubled within him.

"I shall not dine with the Bergholts if they ask me," he reflects to himself; "and I only trust I shall not sit next her at dinner anywhere. So lovely, and yet so hungry!" (sighing). "If I were her husband I should make her eat in private, and play with a few grains of rice or something in public, like the young woman in the Arabian Nights."

CHAPTER XX.

"Passion I found, and love, and godlike pain,
The swift soul rapt by mingled hopes and fears,
Eyes lit with glorious light from the Unseen,
Or dim with sacred tears."

Songs of Two Worlds.

When Leo drove away from The Manor House, he felt as though he had left the best part of his life behind him. It was the first time that the presence of one particular human being had been utterly, absolutely indispensable to his happiness. He had often felt a keen regret at parting from his father, especially in the old school-days, but this agonizing blank was a new experience. The pain was all the keener for its novelty. Men who have many loves leave them lightly and easily replace them; but it could not be so with an ardent chivalrous-minded boy like Leo, to whom the woman he loved was a divinity. Up to the present time, women had played but a small part in his life: he had been thrown little in their way, and sport had seemed to him the great object of existence. But from his boyish days, when he had dreamed of knights and heroes, and sighed after the olden time when the finest rôle of a gallant gentleman was to fight and die in the cause of womanhood, he had always had high and chivalrous thoughts of them.

He had longed, like many another high-spirited lad, to be one of King Arthur's knights, to ride forth to the succor of

distressed damsels, to wear his lady's glove in his helmet, to die with her name engraven on his heart. Later, when these boyish fancies were crowded out by the modern phase of prowess called sport, his thoughts of women were still tinged by the chivalrous poetic old fancies. His ideal was rather an impossibly angelic being, but it was a very good ideal for a young man to have. In this respect he differed happily from many of the rising youth of this generation, who, ere their beards be grown, have learned to think and speak more than lightly of the sex their mother should have made sacred to them. O women of the day, you who cannot help but see this glaring evil creeping on, in the flippant disrespect, the want of reverence which boys, scarce grown to manhood, show for you, who cannot help but see, and yet, far from checking, tolerate, nay, rather laugh at it, have you not much to answer for? Is it better, think you, that instead of having chivalrous thoughts of you, instead of looking up to you and believing with honest reverence in your purity and worth, they should hold you cheaply and utter your name with significant smiles or may-be a coarse jest? When men talked flippantly about the sex in Leo's presence,—when they amused themselves by sneering at virtue, worse, by denying its existence,—when he heard them class all women together without distinction,—the honest flush would rise to his brow, and sometimes the honest anger to his lips, and—he would get laughed at. But in his present frame of mind, imbued with new reverence by his love for Olga, it would have been dangerous for any one to impugn in his hearing the sex of which almost every member was dear and sacred for her sake.

Raymond found his friend very poor company, and was inclined to be cross and cynical with him. He was a selfish young gentleman, as I have said, and did not at all relish being the victim of another person's melancholy.

"Olga has been at her old games, I see," he remarked, with a curve of the lip, when his mother had left them after dinner on the first evening of Leo's return. Raymond was jealous: he did not like Mrs. Stratheden to make such a fuss with Leo, and rather wanted to take the conceit out of his friend in case he should flatter himself too much on the score of Olga's kindness.

A quick flush suffused Leo's face; he had been rather sub-

ject to this young-lady-like affection since his accident: he was silent for a moment, then he said, with considerable warmth,—

"Please don't speak of Mrs. Stratheden in that way: she is an angel. If the best friend I have in the world spoke lightly of her, he would not be my friend any longer. We have always been good friends, Raymond: I should be awfully sorry for anything to interfere with our friendship." And the lad put out his hand across the table with a frank, kindly grace that was irresistible. But there was an unmistakable determination in the tone of the foregoing words, and Raymond had an irritable uneasy feeling of having been "sat upon." The sensation was as disagreeable as it was novel. But he took the proffered hand, saying at the same time, with a smile which rather disfigured his handsome mouth,—

"Of course I won't say a word against your divinity. Will it cost me your friendship if I remark that, in my opinion, no woman is worth men's quarrelling about?"

From this time Mrs. Stratheden was not mentioned between them. It was a dreadful punishment to poor Leo, who would have dearly liked to give vent now and then to his passionate enthusiasm and admiration for her. Raymond had an intuition of this, and was not ill pleased at being able to punish his friend for having made him feel small.

A few days later they started for Scotland, where they were joined by two other men, one of whom had taken the shooting with Raymond.

"I don't think there is a chance of my being able to shoot," Leo had said, before starting. "You had better get some other fellow to take my place."

"You can but try. If you can't manage it, I will send for Tracy. At all events, you can potter about and fish."

So it was settled. But Leo very soon found that the walking was out of the question, let alone the shooting. So when the others took their guns and started off in the dog-cart he would wander away to the stream with his rod and a book and Olga's picture next his heart. It was a new sensation for him, this enforced idleness and solitude. His whole being was pervaded by melancholy; he had nothing to do but to think, and thinking brought him scant comfort. Life, that was so glad a thing to him, had become almost a curse; this gnawing want

of the heart seemed more unbearable than any bodily pain could have been. Morning after morning he wandered down to the stream through groves of mountain-ash, alders, and chestnuts, with a tangle of wild raspberries growing on either side of the scarcely-defined path. Here and there through an opening he could see the purple moors, and the green meadows and yellowing cornfields that lay between him and them, and he would sigh and wish he was striding over the heather after grouse, or doing something, anything that would take him out of himself. The swift clear water rushed over the stones with a pleasant sound, but it seemed to Leo only to intensify the silence and stillness of everything else around.

He would sit down on a rock and watch the bright water sparkling in the sunshine, and the flies swarming over it, and once and again a little silvery trout leaping. He was laughed at every night when he showed the result of his day's labor, a couple of dozen troutlets no bigger than sprats. One day he rode seven miles to a lake in the hollow of the hills. It was a lovely ride; purple moors on either side, with great tufts of fern and bracken and the modest blue-bell of Scotland growing by the roadside. Now and then a covey of birds would get up and fly a yard or two; but they seemed to know Leo had no gun, and did not disturb themselves much about him. The trout-stream brawled below, winding through groves of firs, leaping, flashing, and murmuring garrulously to itself on its joyous way, like some living thing. Leo put up at the minister's house, and the wife, a good-natured but quite common woman, came out, offered him milk, and smiled pleasantly, as women are apt to do at sight of a comely male face, more especially when the vision is rare. She showed him her cows and poultry, whilst the tame goats came and rubbed against his legs. Leo was glad of some one to talk to, particularly a woman, however coarse clay she might be compared with the fine porcelain of his idol.

The good wife questioned him as to why he was not shooting, and Leo told her all about his accident and of Olga's heroic conduct. It was the first time he had spoken of her for weeks, and it was delightful to him. His auditor listened with ready sympathy, her shrewd woman wit not slow to grasp the true state of affairs: it was the pleasantest half-hour Leo had spent for an age. Then he strolled away to the loch. It was

a bright, hot day, with a blue sky, and fleecy clouds that hovered like great birds over the moors, making dark shadowy patches in the purple. Leo thought of the "flocks upon a thousand hills" as he saw the sheep dotted about everywhere and heard the faint tinkle of their distant bells. A broad ripple came across the water, and the trout began to jump. Snipe looked impudently at him from a little island of reeds, a wild duck got up and flew away, a flock of plover circled over his head uttering their dismal cry. Now and again the sharp report of guns was borne on the air and taken up by the echoes.

Leo put his rod together and began to fish. He was in luck: six good-sized fish fell a prey to him in less than half an hour. But there the day's sport came to an end: he whipped the stream for a couple of hours more, but never got a rise. So he threw himself down under a bank of heather and began to dream. If she were only here, now, how passing fair the face of nature would seem, how eloquent this stillness! If he might only sit mutely and watch her broad eyelids, the turn of her head, and her little jewelled fingers! Then he drew forth her cherished image that his kisses had blurred.

"If I could only have a good picture of her," thought the poor lad, "it would be such a comfort to me." Suddenly the thought flashed across him that he would ask her to give him one: it would be an excuse for writing, whether she granted his request or not. Day after day he had resolved to write to her: sometimes he thought of telling her what he suffered and invoking her pity: he had begun many a letter, had written page after page of passionate love and despair, only to tear them to shreds afterwards. It was unmanly, he told himself, to importune a woman with a love she did not return. But what should a man do who loved vainly, loved with a love that cankered life and ate the heart and hope out of it? He rejected utterly the old-fashioned notion of drink and dissipation as a remedy for the heartache. "If you love a pure woman," he said to himself, "it ought to make your life the nobler and the better, even though the love be hopeless. Is a man to bring himself to the level of a beast because he loves an angel and cannot win her? If she never knew it, it would be something to have tried to be a better fellow and of some use in the world for her sake."

Then he would call to mind the talk they had had together about life.

"A man can do so much," she had said, one day, with a sigh. "And there is so little for a woman,—I mean for a woman who is alone in the world, as I am, and who has no ties."

"Would you like to be a man?" he asked.

"No," she answered, with a frank smile: "all my feelings are so much a woman's that I have never regretted my sex. In the first place I am a sad coward, and a man should have no nerves; I hate hardship and discomfort of any sort; and then you know, with my love of the dumb creation, I could never have been a sportsman."

"But what can a man do if he isn't a sportsman, when he has no profession?"

"Do!" cried Olga, with enthusiasm: "everything. Of course I suppose it is right for a man to care for field-sports, or he would not be manly; but do you suppose he is sent into the world with nothing better to do than to kill and maim as many helpless creatures as he can get near? An excellent ambition for a wild Indian who has to live by his bow and spear," continued Olga, scornfully, "but scarcely worthy of a Christian gentleman. If you want something to exercise your combative faculties on, exert them upon misery and vice and want. Oh, if I were a man" (with ardor), "I would try to make something or some one the better for me. It is not to be done in a lazy half-hearted way, but if a man desires from his soul to do good to his kind, there are plenty of ways and means."

"One must go into Parliament first, I suppose," hazarded Leo, whose ideas of how to benefit humanity were extremely vague.

"No doubt that gives you opportunities," answered Olga, "if you go with the honest intention of using them for the benefit of your fellow-creatures, and if you enter upon the life with honest convictions,—not, like some men, ready to tell any falsehood or take any side for the sake of putting M. P. after your name and getting what social distinction those two letters are supposed to give."

Leo, as he dreamed among the heather in the sunny afternoon, pondered in his mind whether it were possible for him

to approach in the faintest degree to Olga's idea of what a man should be.

"It should be a *man's* aim," she had said, "to protect all that is weak, to help all that suffers." His heart echoed to hers as she spoke, but until then it had never entered his mind that he personally could carry out such an idea. Life and its aims, as he had viewed them three months ago, seemed ignoble and unsatisfying to him to-day; but then came the thought, "How can I change it now?"

And then and there, whilst the August afternoon waned, Leo, lying with closed eyes against the heather bank, thought his problem out. He had much to do before he could be fit to enter upon a career such as Olga had vaguely hinted at; he must conquer his own ignorance and shyness first, and to this end he must study and travel. Leo's enthusiasm rose as he drew vivid pictures of an active and useful future, and through the long vista one glorious idea lay always at the end of the goal: he would win Olga's approval. He could never be worthy of her, but if he used all his energies, all his faculties, in straining to approach, however faintly, her ideal, he might be able to say to her, in the days to come, "Whatever I have succeeded in, whatever I have done worth doing, was for your dear sake and because you inspired me."

A glow came over Leo's face, his lips moved to the words, and he opened his blue eyes with a look of gladness and triumph, as though he had already fought his battle and conquered. Once more life held something for him. The day no longer seemed dull, solitude oppressed him not. He rose, took his rod to pieces, shouldered his basket of fish, and with a light heart and step wended his way back to the minister's house. He bade the good wife adieu, left her a couple of fine trout, and started homewards. A mile on, he came upon two of the shooting-party, sitting on a stone waiting for the dog-cart. The pony laden with game, the two brace of handsome pointers, and the good-looking young sportsmen, made a picturesque group.

"What sport?" shouted Leo, as he rode up.

"Twenty brace and nine hares," responded Raymond. "What have you done?"

"Six good-sized trout; but I left two with the minister's wife."

"You should never waste time and civility on ugly old women," laughed Raymond: "there's no satisfaction to be got out of it."

Then the dog-cart came up, and they all went homewards.

That evening, whilst the rest of the party smoked and chatted, Leo sat in his room writing his petition to Olga. He penned a letter full of enthusiastic plans for the future, and finished by begging her to let him have a good picture of her, that he might always have her image near to stimulate and encourage him. He left the letter on the table, went to the open window, and looked out for a long time into the night. Presently he returned to the table, and read over what he had written.

"It is a silly, bragging letter," he said, and tore it into shreds. "If I fail, if, as is more than likely, I never do anything worth the doing, what a pitiful fellow she will think me! No, I won't say a word of my intentions: if she ever hears of anything it shall be actions."

He took up his pen again, and wrote:

"My dear Mrs. Stratheden,

"I should have liked to write to you a great many times since I came here, but there has been nothing of the least interest to tell, and I feel I have already taken up a great deal too much of your time. I often think of you and Mrs. Forsyth and the dear old Manor House (the most perfect place in the world, *I* think), and everything and everybody about it. I shall always remember that month as the happiest of my life. Don't be angry with me. I am going to ask you a very great favor, but I would almost rather you were angry with me and granted it, than that you should forgive me and refuse. You have done so much for me, I ought to be ashamed to ask anything more; but I do so want to have a good, a really good likeness of my dear preserving angel. The one I have is so faded, and does not a thousandth part do you justice. I know I am making a bold request, but I know, too, that your kindness and goodness exceed even my boldness. I shall look most anxiously for your reply. Please remember me very kindly to Mrs. Forsyth, and believe me, always,

"Yours faithfully and devotedly,

"Leo Vyner."

CHAPTER XXI.

"Mais la femme qui soutient l'amour par l'estime, envoie ses amants d'un signe, d'un bout du monde à l'autre, au combat, à la gloire, à la mort, où il lui plaît—cet empire est beau, ce me semble, et vaut bien la peine d'être acheté."

J. J. ROUSSEAU.

OLGA had been perplexed, and, truth to tell, a little nettled, at Leo's persistent silence. Her experience of lovers had led her to expect a series of letters from him containing every phase of love and despair: the only thing she was not prepared for was silence. She did not comprehend the manly, unselfish spirit that prompted his reticence, his fear of giving pain to a heart so kind and sympathetic as hers by betraying his suffering: woman-like, she said to herself, with some pique, "It was a boyish fancy: he has forgotten all about me. I hardly thought he would be cured so soon."

If Leo, instead of being the simple young fellow he was, utterly unversed in the ways of women, had been the most astute of Lovelaces, he could not have chosen a more effective way of rousing Olga's interest and keeping himself before her mind. Morning after morning she, almost unconsciously to herself, turned over her letters to look for his handwriting, and morning after morning there was a kind of unacknowledged disappointment in her mind as none was forthcoming. When Mrs. Forsyth occasionally asked for news of their patient, she was almost vexed with her friend for asking because she had nothing to tell; and one day when Mrs. Forsyth remarked, "I think he might have written," she made quite a petulant answer. Her friend did not seem to remark it, but she was, nevertheless, very much astonished in her own mind. "It is *not possible*," she said to herself, with great emphasis, "that Olga's heart, having been as hard as the nether millstone for years, is now going to melt for a boy like this." The idea worried her inconceivably, and she began to keep her eyes wide open.

Olga missed her patient more than she would have cared to

confess. It had been pleasant to her to have an object of perpetual solicitude; now it was almost a pain to miss Leo's stalwart figure, his frank face, the blue eyes which followed her about with a dog-like fidelity and affection. Blue eyes have not often that faithful look of a dog's eyes, but Leo's had. She filled The Manor House with guests, she would not give herself time to think, and yet she missed him. Then she grew angry, and said to herself that he was ungrateful, and not only ungrateful, but ill-mannered. Common courtesy demanded that he should have written to express his acknowledgments, if nothing else. So poor Leo, doing violence to his desires that he might not vex or trouble the queen of his heart, was working himself steadily into her disfavor.

When at last his letter arrived, she had ceased to expect it. It did not give her much pleasure, either: it contained none of the fervent protestations she might, from his behavior on the night of their parting, have not unreasonably expected: he did not say that life was blank to him because of his absence from her. On the contrary, the letter was evidently written in a thoroughly cheerful and happy vein.

Olga flung it away from her in a pet, and made up her mind not to answer it at all. With the curious inconsistency that is a part of human nature, more especially, I am told, of feminine human nature, she sat up long after her guests had retired, to write a discursive letter to the very person who had been wanting, she said, in common courtesy to her. She even did a much stranger thing. By a singular coincidence, she had the morning previously received an exquisite miniature of herself by Dickinson, which she had designed as a surprise for Mrs. Forsyth on her birthday. It had caught her in one of her happiest moments: her own verdict was that it flattered her outrageously.

"I will send it to him," said proud Olga, who had never given her portrait to a man in her life. And she did, with the following letter:

"My dear Leo,—

"It was an agreeable surprise to find you had not forgotten us. Your long silence had brought us to the conclusion that sport (euphemism, you know, in my opinion, for the 'brutal instincts of the savage'), the blue-bells of Scotland, and other

unknown though dimly-guessed-at fascinations, had obliterated The Manor House and its occupants from your thoughts. Men are naturally ungrateful. Poor Truscott was very disconsolate after you left: he was like Othello with 'his occupation gone,'—the only respect, certainly, in which one could liken him to the Moor. More than once he confided to me that the place seemed 'quite lonesome' without you. Mrs. Forsyth and I too found the time hang a little, until we busied ourselves with preparation for an influx of visitors, who are still with us. It is almost too hot to play hostess: fortunately, every one is equally disposed to 'far niente,' which relieves me to a certain extent of the labor of finding amusement for them. Some, indeed, have considerately paired off, and give no trouble at all, except to find them when one wants to organize a game, picnic, or dance: the gardens, as you know, are admirably adapted for people who are not good at locality to lose themselves in.

"Now I am going to scold you. You might have imagined that I should be anxious to know how my patient progressed. For three weeks you do not write at all: then, when you do, not one word about the arm, or your health, or anything that concerns your individuality. I shall expect a budget in return for this, with all the minutest details. What are your plans for the autumn and winter? Sport, sport, sport, I suppose! We shall be here until October: you might look in upon us *en route* from the North to show us how perfectly robust Scotch air has made you. The doctor says you will not do the birds much harm for a month or two; but I have great faith in your constitution and recuperative powers.

"Write to me, unless letter-writing bores you,—and even if it does. I shall always be interested to hear about you, as, after my month's nursing, I have a feeling that you belong to me. Give my love to Raymond, and believe me, always,

"Very sincerely yours,

"OLGA STRATHEDEN.

"You ask for my picture. I send you one which came yesterday and was destined for *ma chère*. Do not betray me to her. I hardly know if you will recognize the lovely creature in the Florentine frame: it would have been a flattering picture of me five years ago, and ought only to be given to

some one who is never likely to see me again. That, however, will not, I hope, be the case with you. Now good-night; every one else is wrapped in slumber, and I begin to have an uncomfortable feeling of wanting to look over my shoulder to be sure there is no one behind me. I am very brave in the day, but when the sun sets all my courage seems to sink with it."

Why should I tell what Leo felt and did when the post brought him that most precious freight? You messieurs who pish and pshaw over love-passages now were, I presume, once young and enthusiastic, and had accesses of rapture and passion that would seem extravagant and incomprehensible to you now. But you, fair readers, your wits and imaginations are keen in these delicate matters, you will conceive a tolerably correct idea of the effect Olga's letter and picture had on her ardent young lover. You may be quite sure *he* did not consider it flattering. How could he ever thank her enough?—no one but Olga was capable of so graceful an act, done so graciously and without making it appear the favor it was. Leo wrote to her without restraint: he poured out all his heart to her, just as it would have bubbled up to his lips had she been there: he almost thought she was, with that sweet face looking at him out of the picture. It was a letter that must have flattered any woman, it breathed such adoration and reverence. It was not the letter of a man who hoped anything, but of one who wished to offer the best and purest homage his heart was capable of.

Olga was wont to be critical over her love-letters, to be very captious over the turn of a phrase, moved to immoderate mirth over poetic sentiment, intolerably disgusted by a misspelt word. And, alas! many young gentlemen who have been educated at Eton and Oxford are occasionally subject to a lapse in their spelling. As for soldiers, poor fellows! I believe some of them write with the point of their swords and have not room in their kit for a dictionary.

But there was nothing in Leo's letter to move the most cynical mouth to a smile: nay, when Olga had read it she laid it down gently and hid her face in her hands. Something very like tears found their way through her white fingers and fell softly on her bosom. She no longer entertained those

doubts of Leo's affection and gratitude that had embittered her thoughts of him a few days ago.

Since Oliver Beauregard's time, no one had touched Olga's heart. She had liked men, had fancied she might come to care for them in time, but she had always shaken herself free of the fancy. She had schooled herself so hard to believe that men were not to be trusted, and that, for women, love was only a synonym for misery. And yet there was no woman breathing more unfitted by nature to stand aloof from love than Olga: no heart could be more tender, more prone to soft dependence, than hers. Fate and Oliver Beauregard had made her life the barren thing it was to herself, even though it seemed so fair and enviable in the eyes of the world. Leo had stolen into her heart, the heart that had been empty, swept and garnished for so long: but she would not admit it, even to her inmost self. She would have scouted the idea, treated it with impatient scorn. That she, who prided herself on her discretion, her common sense, should for an instant permit herself to entertain a thought of a man years younger than herself,—absurd! preposterous! She went even so far as to say, disgusting! Unfortunately, knowing that things are foolish, being as perfectly awake and alive to the fact as our best friends or our worst enemies can possibly be, does not always hinder us from doing them.

The guests had left The Manor House: Olga had nothing to distract her mind: so she retired to her hammock on the green island, taking with her Balzac's *historiette*, "La Femme abandonnée." Had there been any one to watch her face as she read, they would not have failed to be struck by the lively emotions which chased each other there during the perusal. Need I say that for Gaston she read Leo, for the Vicomtesse de Beauséant, herself? The lines which I transcribe seemed to her singularly applicable to her young lover:

"Elle trouvait en lui le rêve de toutes les femmes, un homme chez lequel n'existait encore ni cet egoïsme de famille et de fortune, ni ce sentiment personnel qui finissent par tuer, dans leur premier élan, le dévouement, l'honneur, l'abnégation, l'estime de soi-même, fleurs d'âme sitôt fanées qui enrichissent la vie d'émotions délicates quoique fortes, et ravivent en l'homme la probité du cœur."

There are few more touching stories than the one of this

woman, plunged from a life which was one continual fête to the horrors of isolation, buried alive with the memories of her brilliant, happy, passionate youth. "Being" (as Balzac describes her) "neither wife nor mother, repulsed by the world, deprived of the only heart which could make hers beat without shame, unable to draw support from any source for her fainting soul, she must seek strength in herself, live her own life, and have no other hope than that of a forsaken woman,—to wait for death, to welcome its coming in spite of the youth and beauty which are still left to her, to feel herself destined for happiness, and to perish without receiving, without giving it! A woman! What a sorrow!"

Why should Olga be intensely affected by this story? Her life had been as different from Madame de Beauséant's as one woman's could well be from another, and yet, had their cases been identical, Olga could not have been more forcibly touched. Was it on the principle that made John Wesley say, as he saw the poor wretch dragged to Tyburn, "There goes John Wesley but for the grace of God?" Why should any of us be proud to have been sheltered from temptation? There is only one thing that can make pride worthy,—to have been tempted and to have conquered.

I fancy, however, that what touched Olga so keenly was sympathy with the woman's loneliness, with her passionate regret of the days of her youth, passing unfilled, unblessed by love or joy. Here was the similitude, the point of union. Then Olga read of Gaston's first interview with the vicomtesse, his passionate letter, burning with all the enthusiasm, the homage, of a young man's first love (a letter inferior to Leo's, she told herself); the cold reasoning tone of Madame de Beauséant's answer (such an answer as Olga felt prudence and discretion would prompt herself to make):

"J'ai bientôt trente ans, monsieur; et vous en avez vingt-deux à peine. Vous ignorez vous-même ce que seront vos pensées quand vous arriverez à mon age. Les serments que vous jurez si facilement aujourd'hui pourront alors vous paraître bien lourds."

She read of the vicomtesse's flight, of Gaston's pursuit, of the nine years of their happiness, when time seemed to dream, and everything smiled upon them. Then came the intervention of Gaston's mother, and the question of his marriage with

the heiress. Here Olga awoke, with a start, to the fact that her case and Madame de Beauséant's could not in any way be parallel. The vicomtesse was not Gaston's wife. She fell into a reverie. Would not the illusion vanish all the more swiftly because of the tie, and would it be less hard to be forsaken in the spirit than in the letter?

She read on to the end with burning eyes and a throbbing heart, read the heart-rending appeal of the woman to whom Gaston's love was all that life held, his reply, his desertion of her, his remorse—too late.

Olga sprang up. "Never!" she cried to herself, with feverish energy; "never!"

From that moment she resolved to banish Leo from her thoughts.

Later in the afternoon, Mrs. Forsyth, taking a solitary stroll, happened to turn her steps to the island. Her attention was arrested by a book lying on the grass: it was open face downwards, and looked as if it had fallen or been thrown there. Mrs. Forsyth picked it up, and observed that there were marks of tears upon the open page. She put up her eyeglass to look at the heading. It was "La Femme abandonnée."

"Then she is really serious," she said to herself, with an air of stupefaction. Mrs. Forsyth took the book and replaced it on the shelf, but she made no remark on the subject to Olga.

CHAPTER XXII.

"For indeed I knew
Of no more subtle master under heaven,
. . . . . .
Not only to keep down the base in man,
But teach high thought and amiable words,
And courtliness, and the desire of fame,
And love of truth, and all that makes a man."

TENNYSON.

LEO, very characteristically, had said nothing in his letters to his father about his accident, but had merely hinted that he had slightly strained his left arm. He would not for the

world have caused his father any anxiety or uneasiness, and was singularly free from that form of selfishness which likes to make the most of its sufferings.

Mr. Vyner was quite ignorant of Leo's compelled abnegation of sport, for in his letters the latter always chronicled the "bags" and suppressed all mention of the fourth gun. On the 30th of August, Leo received the following letter:

"My dear Leo,—

"I have had a great disappointment. As you know, I was to have gone to Cobham for the 1st, and we expected some excellent shooting. I have just heard from Mrs. C. that her poor husband has had a paralytic seizure. The news has shocked me very much, and will you, I am sure. This puts out all my plans. It would not seem like the first of September if I did not take my gun out; but it is dull work shooting alone, and, besides, I would not rob you of your share of the sport. I wish you were here: however, I don't want to interfere with your pleasure, as I suppose you are having capital sport and enjoying yourself thoroughly. There are any quantity of birds, and we shall have lots of pheasants this season, I am glad to say.

"Your affectionate father,

"Ralph Vyner."

After reading the letter, Leo made up his mind to start for home at once. He saw that his father was anxious to have him, and determined not to disappoint him. True, he could do very little in the way of shooting; but the old gentleman would like to have him to walk with and to talk over affairs at night. Leo had only one regret; but it was a very keen one. He had looked forward so intensely to seeing Olga on his way home. Had his father's letter come one day sooner, he could have managed it; but now there was only just time to get home by the following night.

Leo wrote at once to Mrs. Stratheden, expressing his disappointment. That lady, on receipt of the letter, frowned, bit her lip, and chose to imagine that if he had made an effort he could have come. She tore the displeasing communication to shreds, and sat down to write invitations for a new party at The Manor House.

Since the day he had spent thinking by the loch among the moors, Leo had never swerved from the intentions he had formed there. The one thing that troubled him was how to break the news to his father. Mr. Vyner was opposed to progress,—thought people fools who wanted to leave a country, even for a few months, which, in his opinion, was the only one fit to live in, and believed the life of a country gentleman with a comfortable income superior to any other. Up to the present time, Leo had accepted his father's opinions, and to a certain extent acquiesced in them: he had been quite satisfied with the idea of following in the paternal footsteps and devoting his life to tranquil country pursuits, alternated by the excitement of sport. But suddenly all his views had changed; such a life seemed stagnation, a living death. He felt a consciousness of greater capabilities in himself: the chords of ambition had been touched in him, his heart vibrated to them, he could no longer bear to contemplate a useless future such as was destined for him.

The thought of breaking his new views to his father had given Leo considerable uneasiness. Filial instincts were strong in him: until now, the most sacred duty in life had been yielding to his father's wishes, and Mr. Vyner had been an eminently kind, indulgent, and unexacting father. Leo loved and respected him, respected him because he was his father, without stopping to question for an instant whether the respect was due to him independently of their relations to each other. Here again he differed from many of his contemporaries, who look with a mixture of condescension and contempt on their fathers, and treat them rather as necessary evils than oracles: the same healthy moral tone that gave him his chivalrous ideas of women made him reverence his father and treat old people with respect. The fact that he was perfectly unconscious of holding any particular opinions on these subjects, and merely acted as nature and good feeling prompted him, made him thoroughly devoid of any priggishness.

The news must be broken sooner or later. How should he break it? This thought was becoming Leo's torment. He longed to take the plunge, but said to himself,—

"I won't spoil his sport for the first day or two."

Mr. Vyner was exceedingly concerned when he heard the nature of his son's accident. Leo mentioned Mrs. Stratheden's

heroic conduct, but he could not expatiate upon it as he had done to the Scotch minister's wife. Somehow, he felt tongue-tied; and then he did not wish his father to connect his new views in any way with Olga.

"Plucky woman that, by George!" said Mr. Vyner, with enthusiasm. "I should like to see her and thank her. Here's her health!" (the recital took place after dinner). "If it hadn't been for her nerve, you might not have been sitting here now, my boy." And the father's eyes moistened, and he held out his hand, and the two grasped each other as is the undemonstrative way of Englishmen, though it speaks volumes to themselves. "Confoundedly careless of young L'Estrange! I hate playing with fire-arms: you might just as well play at tasting poisons. Keep them for when you want them, is my theory."

The days went on: his father seemed so happy and in such spirits, Leo had no heart to break the evil tidings: evil they would be he knew well enough, but secretly he was chafing and miserable.

It was the fifth evening after his return, and they were smoking their after-dinner cigars together.

"Leo," said Mr. Vyner, suddenly, "do you know I have been thinking you ought to see Moore? I'm afraid your arm is not so well: you seem so restless and fidgety. I'm not very fond of the profession,—thank God, I haven't been to a doctor for thirty years myself,—but in a case of accident it's just as well to be watched: eh, my boy?"

Then Leo suddenly broke out:

"My dear old dad, it isn't that. My arm's right enough. I have something on my mind."

His father looked at him. He had not a very rapid intelligence, but two ideas occurred to him simultaneously. A woman. Debt. If a man had anything on his mind, it must be connected with one or the other.

Leo paused, and Mr. Vyner had time to take a long puff at his cigar. Then he said with a certain dry emphasis,—

"Well, I suppose it is nothing so bad but what your father can help you out of it?"

"My dear father," Leo answered, quickly, "if it were not for you, it would not be a trouble at all."

Mr. Vyner stared blankly at his son. His imagination,

having expended itself on the two causes of a man's undoing, refused to grasp a third. So he waited to be enlightened.

"You know," proceeded Leo, a little hurriedly, "I have always thought the sort of life we led the best in the world. I am devoted to hunting and shooting; but latterly, latterly——"

Leo stopped: he would not for the world make any reflection upon his father by saying such a life was selfish and useless, so he had to come to a full stop.

"Well?" said Mr. Vyner, dryly,—"latterly?"

"I have thought," proceeded his son, "I have thought I should like to find a little food for my mind,—to travel,—to see other countries, and——"

Mr. Vyner's mind returned triumphantly to his first idea.

"There is a woman at the bottom of this," he remarked, in a tone which admitted of no contradiction.

Leo was dumfounded at his father's perspicacity. He did not know that a man has only to live a certain number of years to be able to ask with perfect security the world-famed question, "Who is she?"

"I knew it," cried Mr. Vyner, triumphantly.

"Well, yes," answered Leo, in a low voice. "I did not mean to have spoken of her, but it is quite true. I love the best, the noblest woman in the world."

"Of course," interrupted his father, dryly.

"Ay, sir, she is; and you have only to see her to confess that whatever I might say of her would be insufficient to do her justice."

Mr. Vyner smiled significantly to himself, as much as to say, "The poor boy is very far gone; but let him rave: his complaint requires humoring."

"Well, well," he said, encouragingly, "and when am I to see this young paragon, whom I suppose you intend to give me for a daughter-in-law?"

A cloud came over Leo's face.

"There is no more chance of her being anything to me than there is of my becoming King of England."

Mr. Vyner's brow contracted.

"Leo," he uttered, sternly, "you're not making a fool of yourself about a married woman!"

"Good heavens, sir," cried Leo, warmly, "what do you

take me for?" He was young and ingenuous enough to look upon loving another man's wife as a crime.

His father's face relaxed.

"Well," he remarked, "perhaps you will explain the matter. If a woman isn't married and isn't a princess of the blood royal, there is no reason, as far as I know, why any man shouldn't marry her, provided he be a gentleman and can keep her. Pray *why* can't she be anything to you?"

"She is beautiful, clever, rich," answered Leo: "she has everything. In comparison I have nothing. What have I to offer her?"

"Hang it all," cried Mr. Vyner, testily, "you are not a pauper. You will have five thousand a year when I die, and the property is improving, and if you have set your heart on marrying, you might trust to my liberality, I think. Who *is* this girl? A daughter of Mrs. Stratheden, I presume."

"It is Mrs. Stratheden herself," answered Leo, briefly.

His father gave a low whistle of intelligence.

"A widow! the devil! that accounts for it. You need say no more, my boy. Older than yourself, of course; been leading you on, playing the fool with you, and then sending you to the right-about. I know their game. I always had a horror of widows myself. Well, I am very glad, under the circumstances, there *is* no chance of my having her for a daughter-in-law."

Leo turned pale. He felt his passion rising. Never in his life had he spoken an angry word to his father. He got up quickly and went out through the open window into the garden and at racing speed towards the wood. He felt that nothing but rapid movement or fierce speech could allay the fury in his heart. His angel, his darling, to be profaned by coarse speech!

"D—— the woman!" muttered Mr. Vyner, as his son dashed through the window. "I did not think the boy cared two straws about a petticoat. Some artful designing hussy, I'll be bound, probably old enough to be his mother: those are the women who always get hold of raw boys and make fools of them. Thank God, no woman ever made a fool of me!" And Mr. Vyner pulled up his shirt-collar with a justifiable feeling of pride.

It was half an hour before Leo returned.

"Father," he said, quietly, "if you don't mind, we'll drop the subject of my—my love, and talk about the other thing."

"But I suppose one's the natural consequence of the other," growled Mr. Vyner. "When a man's in love, and his suit don't prosper, he generally does one or two things. If he has the element of the blackguard in him, he goes full tilt to the devil; if he's a decent fellow, he fills his head with quixotic ideas about doing something very wonderful in the world, setting the Thames on fire, or something equally remarkable. You'll get all right when hunting begins. Meantime, if you fancy travelling for a month or two, go, in God's name, and I will write you a check for your journey to-night if you like."

"Thanks, sir, but that isn't the sort of travelling I want. It will take a good deal more than a couple of months for me to see what I want to. A tour in Switzerland or Germany is the furthest from my thoughts. I want to go to America, not as a cockney tourist, but to learn something about the country. In fact," continued Leo, dropping his voice, "I want more than that: I want to go round the world, and to do it at leisure."

A long silence followed. Mr. Vyner was paralyzed: he felt as if Leo had struck him,—a mingled rage and stupor, as though the son whom he loved, and who had always been dutiful, had defied and threatened him. His head sank on his chest, his whole soul was flooded with disappointment.

Leo saw that he was suffering, and was smitten by remorse.

"Don't be vexed, dad," he murmured, leaning forward and laying a gentle hand on his father's arm: "think it over. I don't want to go yet. God knows I would rather do anything than pain you; but I feel that to go on doing nothing and eating my heart out with wanting what I cannot have, would kill me."

"You might think of me," answered his father, in a hoarse voice. "Have I been a bad father to you?—have I ever denied you anything? You have lived all your life with me, and I've done the best I could for you, and yet in a few days this woman makes you forget all about me and what you owe to me, and you don't care two straws whether you bring my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave or not."

Anything like pathos from his father was so unusual that it stirred Leo's heart to its inmost depths.

"But, dad," he pleaded, "why should you grieve? It would only be a matter of eight or nine months; and I have been away from you nearly as long as that before."

"In a Christian country," answered Mr. Vyner, with energy. "If you broke your neck hunting, or got shot, I might say, 'God's will be done,' but out there among savages, to be murdered or tortured perhaps, or shipwrecked on the voyage. No, no! My belief is that Providence looks after those who look after themselves, not people who tempt Him by wandering where they have no business and putting themselves wilfully in harm's way. If you're ambitious, if you want something to occupy your mind, why not stop at home and go into Parliament?"

"I wish I had the chance," said Leo, eagerly.

"Vivian was sounding me about it only the other day," replied Mr. Vyner. "He wants to give up his seat at the next election. He is getting worn out, and late hours don't suit him; and he hinted that if you liked to go in for it, you should have all his influence."

"Did he?" cried Leo, with enthusiasm. "And what did you say?"

"I said," answered Mr. Vyner, bitterly, "that my son and I knew the value of God's gifts too well to live in a pestilential atmosphere the best months of the year, and to make ourselves the servants of a party, whether of ambitious place-hunters or of a parcel of poor fools who don't know when they're well off. I thought I might speak for you as I would for myself. I have heard 'It's a wise child that knows its own father,' but it seems to me there would be just as much truth in it if they put it the other way."

An hour ago, Mr. Vyner would as soon have thought of proposing to his son to go into Parliament as of suggesting to him to shoot pheasants in August; but then there had been no question of the other dreadful alternative. One was an act of egregious folly which only entailed a certain waste of money and time; the other seemed to him a question of life or death.

Leo dropped the subject of his travels and went eagerly into discussion of his chances of succeeding Mr. Vivian.

"Pray," said his father, severely, "may I ask upon what grounds you consider yourself fit to become a legislator for

your country? Not," he continued, with angry sarcasm, "but what there are some of the d——dest fools in the House that you could meet with in a day's journey."

"I don't know anything at present, of course, dad," answered Leo, deprecatingly, "but I can study, and I have lots of time before me."

"You think you're going to become a great orator all at once, I suppose," remarked Mr. Vyner, who had fallen into an exceedingly bad temper, a most unusual occurrence. "Why, when you had to make a speech to the tenants at your coming of age, you were as nervous as you could be, and blushed and stammered like a school-girl. They couldn't hear you half way down the tent."

"I dare say I shall mend of my shyness, sir," answered Leo, good-humoredly. "And I don't suppose any great demand will be made on my oratorical powers at present. I don't expect to be Prime Minister or Leader of the Opposition, for the next ten years at all events," he added, laughing.

"That's fortunate!" said his father, grimly. He was not to be joked into a good humor. "I shouldn't have wondered if you did. The conceit of boys nowadays passes all understanding. However, in case they should discover the genius that I am probably too great a fool to see, and want to give you a place in the Cabinet all at once, you'd better take a trip to the sea-side and fill your mouth with pebbles and roar to the waves! No doubt you'll soon be a second Demosthenes and rant with the best of 'em!"

With this, Mr. Vyner pulled the bell sharply, and ordered his whisky-and-water in so irascible a tone that the butler was thunderstruck.

"I do think," he observed down-stairs, "that master and Mr. Leo must have been having words, the old gentleman spoke in such a hirritable tone. But there! I don't know, either; for Mr. Leo looked just as smiling and pleasant as ever."

"Bless his heart!" said the comely housekeeper, who doted on him; "he always has a smile and a pleasant word for every one. I *do* wish I could see him looking as stout and strong as when he left home. He's fell away dreadfully."

Nothing more was said by Mr. Vyner and Leo that night on the subject so distasteful to the former, nor was it alluded

to again for some days; but Leo took an opportunity of seeing Mr. Vivian and having some private conversation with him.

"I am very glad to have had this talk with you," Mr. Vivian said, in conclusion, shaking Leo heartily by the hand. "I had no idea you held the views you do, nor indeed that you had any political views at all. I pitched upon you in my mind because I thought you would do less harm than a good many others; now I shall look forward to see what good you can do. Don't disappoint me. I don't think you will."

To which Leo returned a modest answer.

"I know I am very young and extremely ignorant at present, but I can learn. I don't mean to aim at great things: my only ambition is to be of some use, however humble, in the world. If I fail, it shall not be for want of trying."

Leo betook himself with ardor to the study of the books Mr. Vivian recommended. It was dry work sometimes, and a weariness to his flesh, but he persevered all the same. Sometimes he would wake up with a start, to find that the subject of the British Constitution had changed itself into Olga: her dark eyes were looking at him from the page, her glowing lips were preaching eloquent themes in his ears. There were times when he would fling his book away, and, burying his face in his arms, cry, "Oh, my darling! my darling! how can I live my life through without you?"

The desire to see her became almost an agony: he grew white and thin, and wandered about like a restless spirit. He found it impossible to concentrate his thoughts upon any other subject. So at last he wrote to her, and asked permission to pay a visit to The Manor House. Two days later he had an answer dated from Curzon Street:

"Dear Leo,—

"I am in town for a week or so, and shall be very glad to see you. I am then going on a round of visits, and don't expect to be back in Blankshire until after Christmas. Come and dine with me to-morrow, and we will go to a theatre."

"Do you mind putting off shooting the Ashton coverts for a day or two, sir?" said Leo, looking up at his father as he laid the letter down.

"No, my boy; it makes no difference to me," answered Mr. Vyner, in a cheerful voice. "Where are you off to?"

"I have business in town," was on Leo's lips; but he had such a habit of speaking the truth that the words did not come readily.

"I want to go to town for a couple of days," he said.

"All right. I'll get you to take up my new gaiters and tell Roberts they don't fit; and you might as well look in at Moore's and see how they are getting on with that gun."

Mr. Vyner spoke in a frank, unsuspicious tone; inwardly he was saying,—

"He's going to see that infernal woman!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Then after length of days he said thus: 'Love
For love's own sake, and for the love thereof,
Let no harsh words untune your gracious mood;
For good it were, if anything be good,
To comfort me in this pain's plague of mine;
Seeing thus how neither sleep nor bread nor wine
Seems pleasant to me, yea, no thing that is
Seems pleasant to me; only I know this,
Love's ways are sharp for palms of piteous feet
To travel, but the end of such is sweet:
Now do with me as seemeth you the best.'"

The Two Dreams.

Leo's heart beat violently as he jumped from his hansom at the door of No. 1000 Curzon Street. In the joy of his heart, he would have liked to supplement his cordial "How are you, Truscott?" by a shake of the hand. He had not seen Mrs. Stratheden since she bade him good-by by the water-side that night: as he walked up-stairs behind Truscott, he was trembling with suppressed excitement. He was going to see her again!—he would not have given up this rapture, nor delayed it an hour, for the fairest offer which any tempter could have made him. Such it is to be young and in the first flush of the master-passion!

But the room into which he is ushered is empty. A minute or two of eager impatience, then the door opens and admits the queen of his heart. Leo feels a wild desire to throw himself at her feet, to commit some extravagance in the exuberance of his joy; but, fortunately, there are hidden laws which prevent a young gentleman in evening dress and a white tie from making a mountebank of himself: so he only goes forward with a heightened color and kindling eyes, to take and kiss the dainty hand that is cordially outstretched to him. Then he sits down by Olga, not in the least conscious that he is embarrassing her by the fixity and ardor of his gaze. It is such intense pleasure to see her once again. Olga cannot but feel flattered, though the situation is a little awkward.

"Why do you look at me so?" she says, with a rather embarrassed smile. "Are you thinking how much plainer I am than the very flattering picture I was vain enough to send you?"

There is a dash of coquetry in Mrs. Stratheden's little speech, for no one could mistake the admiration of which Leo's eyes are eloquent.

"Flattering!" he echoes. "How could *any* picture flatter *you?* A picture, whose eyes never change, and whose lips are dumb!"

Olga laughs: there is a little ring of pleasure in her voice: how can she be a woman, and not care to be adored by a man whom she likes? It is the reciprocal liking, though, that makes pleasure of what without it is but a weariness to the flesh. The tenderest love-speeches fall dull and tame on a woman's ear if she be indifferent to the man who utters them.

"Where have you learnt to make such gallant speeches, pray, sir?" asks Olga; and Leo answers,—

"Are they gallant? My inspiration comes from you."

At this moment Mrs. Forsyth enters the room; nor is Leo alone again with Mrs. Stratheden once that evening. It is not quite what he had hoped for, but still it is delightful. Of the play he sees and hears nothing: he sits a little behind Olga's chair in the box, absorbed in contemplation of her. The back of a small Greek head, the charming *nuque*, the little ear in which a diamond glistens like a dewdrop,—these things give a lover far more delight than the finest play ever put upon a stage.

"I want you to help me choose a horse to-morrow," says Mrs. Stratheden, as Leo puts her into the brougham. "Come for me at three, and we will go round and see if we can find anything to suit. And you will dine with us quietly at seven afterwards, won't you?"

It is a bright, clear October night, and, when the brougham has driven off, Leo stands for a moment hesitating as to what he shall do. There is a delightful tumult in his brain: he wants to reduce the sweet confusion to order, that he may think. He neither feels inclined for the club nor for bed: so he strolls along until he gets to Piccadilly, and then, unconsciously quickening his pace, proceeds onwards in a straight line. So intent are his thoughts that when at last he is reminded of the fact that patent-leather shoes are not as comfortable for a constitutional as shooting-boots, he is well on his way to Hammersmith. A hansom is coming along, and he jumps into it, and drives back to his hotel. He goes to bed, and dreams that Olga has written to say she will never see him again. He wakes in horrible agitation, succeeded by a delightful consciousness that it was a delusion and that in a few hours he will be with her. It is almost worth while having a bad dream for the delight of the awakening.

The afternoon is spent in selecting the horse of which Mrs. Stratheden is or fancies herself in want.

"What shall we do this evening?" she asks Leo. "Shall we go to another theatre?" Seeing how his face falls, she adds, "Or shall we spend a quiet evening at home?"

"*I* should like that very much better," he answers; "but will it bore you?"

"Not *very* much," says Olga, smiling. "*Sans adieu*," as the carriage stops at Leo's hotel.

Mrs. Forsyth has for many years indulged a habit, both agreeable to herself and to Mrs. Stratheden's friends, of retiring after dinner to take a nap. This habit, begun from a complaisant idea of excusing an absence that might otherwise offend Olga's delicacy by looking pointed, had ended in becoming a gratification which it was very unpleasant to forego. But Mrs. Forsyth had conceived a great jealousy of Leo, and was reluctant to give him the opportunity of being alone with Olga: so she departed so far from her usual custom and tact as to say, whilst they were awaiting his arrival before dinner,—

"Shall I take my nap as usual this evening?"

Now, Olga quite saw through the question, and felt a shade vexed with her friend for putting it. She felt more vexed still with herself for the faint blush that overspread her face, and, turning to arrange some flowers in one of the vases, answered,—

"Do whatever is most agreeable to yourself, ma chère."

"That will be to take my nap," Mrs. Forsyth answered, promptly, hastening like a skilful general to repair her error. But she could not refrain from a Parthian shaft. "I was afraid you might be a little bored. Boys are rather heavy to entertain."

"I think Mr. Vyner has got beyond the awkward stage of boyhood," answered Olga, with some coldness.

"And I think whatever you think, my love," said Mrs. Forsyth, cheerfully. "I know you are so thoughtful that you would rather run the risk of being a little bored than of interfering with my indulgence."

Here Leo's arrival put a stop to further discussion. He had not intended to say a word to Olga about his plans for the future, nor even to hint at his chance of a seat in Parliament; but, once alone with her, the charm of her presence, her magnetic power over him, made his intentions melt into thin air, and he poured out all his thoughts to her.

As she listened, a feeling of surprise and pleasure stole into her heart. She loved dearly to have power and influence, and she loved to use it for good. That she should have stirred up the dormant vigor of a mind so manly and yet so gentle and sensitive as Leo's, gave her keen pleasure. As she listened to him, she felt capable both of loving and respecting him: a pang shot through her heart as the remembrance of the difference between their ages forced itself upon her. All her life, Olga had had thoughts of doing active good in the world: that the thoughts had not been unfruitful, her bounty to all around her, and her large unostentatious charities, afforded ample proof. But the mere giving of money and food did not satisfy her: there is so much more to be done in the world than to give mere temporary relief, she thought. For years it had been the desire of her heart to find a man who shared her opinions and had energy to carry them out. How often had she diffidently imparted her views to her lovers and

been reasoned with, smiled at, or not understood! This want of sympathy with her cherished ideas had, more than anything, militated against their success. And here at last, but too late, was one after her own heart, one whose chief charm was that his thoughts were hers because she had inspired them. She did not pause to reflect that the sympathy towards the rest of mankind which his love for her had bred might die away as it had sprung up; nor that theories which seem very noble and stirring to youth fade away before the harsh lessons of practical experiment: she looked at the fire in his eyes, listened to the enthusiasm in his voice, and believed in him. It was part of Olga's nature to put implicit faith in those she cared for. And indeed it would have been difficult for any one to look at Leo's ardent face and doubt that, whatever difficulties the future might throw in his way, his intentions were thoroughly sincere.

"And what have you determined about going abroad?" Olga asked, at the close of a very exhaustive discussion of his plans.

"I must try to get my father used to the idea by degrees. But I hate to give him pain. And yet how is a man who has seen nothing of the world to feel and speak with authority on questions of universal importance to mankind? I don't believe all the books that were ever written could do half for getting one out of one's narrow-mindedness and prejudice that six months' travel in fresh places and among fresh people with one's eyes open would do."

Looking at him, Olga for the moment felt a strong sympathy with his father's reluctance to part from him; and yet had she not herself suggested the idea of his travelling?

"It is better that he should go," she said to herself, as she felt a strange tenderness for him creeping into her heart.

She rose, a little abruptly for her, and walked towards the piano.

"Stay where you are," she said, with an imperious gesture, as he was about to follow her. "I am going to sing to you."

And Olga sang in her sweet pathetic voice, songs that were all sad and plaintive, and Leo listened till his pleasure turned to intense pain. Ambition, hope of the future, all faded into despair: how could he live life through without this woman, whose presence had become the only joy he knew?

The voice he loves ceases. Olga rises, and gently closes the piano. Leo is so still, she almost fancies he has gone to sleep. Then suddenly he gets up, and, coming towards her with a face so haggard and miserable it shocks her, he says,—

"How shall I live my life without you? Oh, Olga! have pity upon me!"

She has sunk down on a chair, and he kneels at her feet. He is very young, very unworldly wise; he does not know the gentle, easy familiarity with which men of fashion woo, nor if he did would he essay to copy it: he knows nothing but that his heart is torn with agony at the thought of losing, of being parted from Olga.

"I have tried to fill my head with other thoughts; I have imagined that work and ambition could satisfy me; but it is all a hollow sham: nothing but you can satisfy me; there is no room in my heart for anything but you. I have boasted like a vain fool to you of the great things I would do, and you, if you were not so good and pitiful, would have laughed me to scorn for it: you know that I am a mere puppet in your hands, to do and think what you choose. Oh, if there were only not the gulf between us that there is! if you were poor, and I could work and toil for you, and win my way to something that would make me more worthy of you! but to feel that you stand so immeasurably far above me, so hopelessly out of reach of me, breaks my heart."

Olga's mouth quivers; there are unshed tears in her dark eyes: a dozen contradictory emotions are passing through her breast. If love like this could last!—if it could only last! and then she remembers the story of "La Femme abandonnée." Gaston was as impassioned as this; thousands of men have felt what Leo feels, and have wearied of their love once attained, and marvelled at and cursed it in after-years.

"Come and sit by me, Leo," she says, softly. "I have something to say to you." And he obeys her. She gives her cool white hand into his fevered clasp, and speaks soothingly to him, as a mother might to an unreasonable child whom she loves too well to chide. "You will not believe me,—you will be angry with me,—but I am going to tell you the truth. If there were no greater obstacle between us than those you name, if only my wealth and those other charms which you flatter me that I possess stood between us, and I" (pausing)

"*loved* you, they would go for nothing with me. I think the greatest pleasure in life is to give to those you love; and no suspicion could ever enter my heart of the sincerity of the love of one whom I loved in return."

Leo hangs breathless on her words: the first gleam of hope breaks through the night of his despair.

"There is a much greater obstacle than any of which you know," Olga continues, with a slight quiver in her voice. "Even when I tell you, you will deny it, and fight against it, but it is there all the same, and it is so great a one that it would hinder me from giving you hope, *even* if I loved you."

She is so careful not to say she does, for then she knows all her arguments would be blown away like chaff before the wind. Leo is silent, but his eyes question hers.

"You are three-and-twenty, and I am twenty-nine: there is six years difference between us,—an overwhelming difference, when the age is on the woman's side. Don't interrupt me! It is just as natural to you now to prefer a woman older than yourself as ten or fifteen years hence it will be to seek one who is young and fresh. Now you like a woman of the world; she puts you at your ease, makes you at home with yourself, entertains and surprises you with the knowledge that experience has taught her. In after-life the reverse of all these things will recommend itself to you. When you are five-and-thirty, in the very prime of manhood, I shall be past forty, that horrible period of a woman's life when she is not too old still to have the desire for love, and yet has the agony of feeling she can no longer inspire it. It is different from a woman who has married young,—her children are grown or growing up, her husband has aged with her; but picture to yourself the case of a woman intensely conscious of being faded and *passée*, struggling to keep alive in the man she adores the love that is the essence of her life, and knowing that the task is impossible, and that by her efforts, her anxiety, she is casting the last planks away from her. She becomes jealous, tyrannical; she hates all women younger and fairer than herself; she is ill-tempered and exacting with the man whose love is the only thing on earth she desires, and knows not whether to hate him or herself most."

Olga has dropped her cool reasoning tone, and speaks with a vehemence quite foreign from her habit. Seeing the look

of utter wonder in Leo's eyes, she breaks off, and, forcing a smile, says,—

"I have bewildered you. Was I looking like a second Medea? You wonder how I know these things,—I who am not yet forty, and have not had any experience like that I describe. But I have a lively imagination: there are very few things I cannot picture to myself, and *I know* my intuitions are correct."

"Yes," answers Leo, looking intently at her with his frank blue eyes, "you have bewildered and astonished me. Shall I tell you why? It is to think that you should know yourself so little as to imagine that a man who had once cared for you could ever have a thought of any other woman. If you were to lose your beauty, which I don't think you ever will, because it lies so much in your expression, you would only lose a tithe of your charm. When you are sixty you will have just the same sweet gracious ways that make one love you now, and, if it were possible, you will be still more clever and delightful."

Olga smiles, but there is more of sadness than mirth in her smile.

"My dear boy," she says, laying a caressing hand on the young fellow's arm, "you think so now, and I *know* you are wrong. Do you imagine, though, it would be any consolation to me to hear you confess later that I was right? If I reproached you with broken promises, you would have a right to turn upon me and say, 'But you knew exactly what *must* happen: you warned me of it yourself.' Have you ever been in love before, Leo?"

"Never," he answers, emphatically.

"Well, but at all events you have read love-stories: you have heard of men ready to do anything in the world to win a woman, who, when they had won her, did not always remain faithful to her?"

"They were not women like you," answers Leo, loyally.

"My poor boy," says Olga, pityingly, "you are very much infatuated."

"I may be a fool," he answers, eagerly, "but you would find me a faithful one."

Olga pauses for a minute.

"As I told you just now," she says, presently,—"I am twenty-nine years old. You will suppose that in all these years I have

heard some declarations of love: don't frown!" (laughing). "Ah, Leo, you are like the rest of your sex: you try to persuade a woman she is something more than mortal, and yet you are disposed to quarrel with any other man who presumes to bear the same opinion. Why, my dear, when you were quite a child, I was a grown-up young lady, being flattered and spoiled and having my head turned. Well, since then I have been told several times every year by men that they could not possibly live without me."

Olga does not mean to be cruel: she fancies she is wounding herself so much by her confessions that Leo can have no right to be hurt. But he is suffering acutely. "And yet," she proceeds, with a shade of scorn, "they *have* lived without me: several have married, and are, I believe, devoted to their wives; and no one that I know of is going about with a broken heart for my sake."

"Try me," murmurs Leo, "try me."

Mrs. Stratheden smiles.

"That is the worst of it. I cannot *try* you. If I made the experiment, I should have to abide by you, and you by me: I could not return you as unsatisfactory."

Leo knows no longer how to plead: she is in a vein half jesting, half bitter. What shall he say to her? If she had been angry at his presumption, he could have sued for forgiveness; but he is too ignorant of the world to know how to treat her present mood.

"Don't let us talk of this any more," she says, rising, and walking away from him; then, returning and laying her hand gently on his shoulder, "Every man has to go through the same thing,—nearly every man, at least: it is like cutting his teeth or having the measles" (laughing).

Then suddenly she changes from gay to grave.

"Don't think me heartless, Leo," and the tears shine in her beautiful eyes; "don't think I do not value your love. I know it is true and honest, and I believe you would be faithful (as far as any man can be); but it is impossible. I will be your best friend, if you will have me. Love me if you will, but do not make your love a pain. Your wife" (smiling through tears), "your wife is a little girl in a pinafore now: when you marry her I shall be a nice gray-haired old lady."

"My wife," said Leo, huskily, coming a step nearer and

looking down into her eyes with a strange, bitter expression, "my wife is here, or nowhere: no other will ever be born for me."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"Lo, the summer is dead, the sun is faded;
Even like as a leaf the year is withered,
All the fruits of the day from all her branches
Gathered, neither is any left to gather.
All the flowers are dead, the tender blossoms,
All are taken away; the season wasted,
Like an ember among the fallen ashes."

SWINBURNE.

So, after all, this visit that Leo had looked forward to as the opening of the gates of paradise did him no good. On the contrary, it did him an immense deal of harm, for it scattered all the ideas that hard reading had put into his brain, and immeasurably decreased his sympathy for the bodily woes of others, since he began to feel that any corporeal pain would be pleasure compared with the agony he suffered in his mind. An older man, a man with more experience of women, would not have been plunged into despair by Olga's words: on the contrary, they would have given him food for hope. But it was otherwise with Leo: he only saw in them the delicacy which made her, instead of chiding his presumption, rather place the difficulties on his side than on hers. "*Si jeunesse savait.*" It is an excellent thing, however, when youth does not know, and is filled with doubts and fears instead of with undue confidence. Leo grew pale and thin (this stalwart young fellow, who, twelve months ago, would have ridiculed the idea of anything but sheer illness taking the zest out of sport): he rode hard,—not recklessly, for he was too manly, too full of vitality, to wish to shake life off because just now it was pain to him instead of pleasure; he tried to study, but found it impossible: the only thing that soothed him was fresh air and exercise. His usually vigorous appetite failed, and he smoked more than was good for him. All this time his father was

watching him narrowly, and cursing in his heart the woman who had brought his boy to this miserable pass. If curses had any effect on the cursed, poor Olga would have probably pined away and died under the old man's savage anathemas; but from her occasional letters to Leo it appeared that she enjoyed her usual health, which, however, was not at the best of times robust.

Mr. Vyner had made up his mind that he would not seem to notice the change in his son: if he did, he felt there would be a loop-hole for Leo to bring forward the subject of his travels, the direst misfortune that could befall. And poor Leo did not go moping about and looking injured, but tried very hard to be bright and cheery, and to enter into all the topics which interested his father, and had done himself until recently. The winter passed; all sport was over: it was then the father began to feel that something must be done, even if it involved the sacrifice of his pet prejudices. And so one night he said, with an abrupt resolution which, from the pain it caused him, held more real pathos than a long and touching speech could have done,—

"This sort of thing won't do, my boy. Send for Bradshaw, pack up your traps, and set off on your travels as soon as you like."

Leo looked up quickly, heard the tremulous falter in the strong voice, saw the quiver in the muscles of the firm mouth, and the dimness in the kind eyes.

"No, no, dad," he answers, gently; "we won't talk about my travels: you know I am going into Parliament instead."

He sighed wearily, unconscious that he did so,—it had become such a habit of late. When Mr. Vyner was deeply moved, he was wont to assume a choleric air. But Leo was in the secret of this.

"Well, what the devil are you going to do? Do you think it's manly, sir, to go puling and pining about like a miss in her teens in love with the curate? There used to be a good old song in vogue in my time,—

> 'If she be not fair for me,
> What care I how fair she be?'

and any man who had a particle of pluck or self-respect used to be of the same opinion. Is there only one woman in the

world, I should like to know? Stuff and humbug! Don't stop shilly-shallying here! go and look about you. A strapping fellow like you isn't likely to have to wait long for a woman's smiles. Let this paragon of yours see you have eyes for somebody beside herself: it will do more to bring her to her bearings than all the whining and whimpering in the world."

"I did not know I wore my heart upon my sleeve," Leo answered, with some dignity. "Have I complained or bored you with my lamentations because I cannot have the woman I love?"

"Love! pshaw!" cried Mr. Vyner, with much the accent of disgust he might have given vent to if any one had put a basket of stale fish in close proximity to him. "Love! My good fellow, if you could but have six months of this wonderful creature, I'll be bound at the end of it we shouldn't hear much more about your love. No!" (replying to the first part of Leo's speech), "I did not say you *had* bored me with your lamentations. I would rather you had: it does people good to talk about their woes. It is your long miserable face, and your fits of silence, that tell me what is going on in your mind. And, as I said before, if your good sense or your pride can't do anything for you, why, in heaven's name, go and travel, and get drowned, or shot, or put out of your misery somehow!"

"I wish, sir," said Leo, with a melancholy smile, "you would try and divest your mind of the idea that some dreadful fate must necessarily overtake a man who goes for a six months' trip abroad."

"And I wish," retorted his father, "that you would divest your mind of the idea that junketing about to a lot of infernal uncivilized places is a better cure for the heart-ache than a few grains of resolution and common sense. However, I've said my say: go, and for God's sake, if you do come back, come back a little more like the *man* you were ten months ago."

And Mr. Vyner, being greatly moved, and equally averse from betraying himself, went out, and banged the door with a violence that made everything in the room tremble.

"It is the only thing for me," mused Leo; "and yet how can I leave the dear old fellow, when I know what pain and grief it will be to him!"

So the subject was left, for the time being, in abeyance, and Leo proposed going to spend a month or two in town. It might

be poison to him to be so near Olga, to see her often, but the poison would be sweet, and he could not go on eating his heart out at home with nothing to do. It was not that he had given up his studies, nor his ambition, nor his desire of doing good in the world; but, in the unsettled state of his mind, he could not bring that concentration to bear upon them that he knew was absolutely necessary.

"After I have seen her again," he argued to himself, "I shall be better. I *will* conquer this morbid restlessness."

Poor lad! he did not guess what new pangs were in store for him.

Mrs. Stratheden was in town: he saw her frequently, but, whether by accident or design, never alone. And almost whenever he saw her the same man was with her, paying her marked attention, which it was evident she permitted, whether she encouraged it or not. This man was Lord Harley. He was about forty, clever, distinguished-looking, had travelled a good deal, and had met Olga at a country-house in the winter. He had decided at once that she was the woman of all others to suit him: he had a great admiration and respect for her, believed thoroughly in the power of his own will, and was fully determined that she should be Lady Harley.

And Olga for various reasons was content to receive his attentions. In the first place, his conversation amused and interested her; in the second, he was so highly thought of in the world that his homage could not fail to flatter her; and in the third, she was furious with herself for allowing Leo to get so large a hold upon her thoughts and imagination, and was determined, *coûte que coûte*, to shake off his influence. And yet, despite her efforts and resolutions, the more she saw of Lord Harley the more enamored she became of Leo. The contrast between the boy's passionate enthusiasm and the man's grave self-possession struck her with a chill in Lord Harley's presence. The man's wooing made her feel weary and world-worn, as though the fires of youth had smouldered into ashes; Leo's ardor, his devotion, his very misery, awakened a keen response in her, and stirred the pulses of the heart she had chosen to consider cold and dead.

So much the more determined was she not to yield to the folly of which she had predicted the ending. To make herself stronger, she would frequently bring up in society the

subject of women marrying men younger than themselves. She never heard but one opinion, and that coincided with her own. What can you expect? If a woman commits such a piece of folly, she does it with her eyes open, and thoroughly deserves all she is sure to get. A woman has no right to take advantage of a boy's infatuation; "it is cruelty to him!" said some one; and this remark rankled horribly in Olga's mind.

"Would it be cruel," she said to herself, in passionate contradiction of this last verdict, "when I can give him so much?—when I can make his future what he dreams it, and gratify his ambition and love, and help him to a name in the world, all at once?"

"And when you have done all this," answered another voice in her heart, "he will be weary of you" (there is no burden on love so heavy as enforced gratitude), "and some other woman will reap the fruit of your sacrifices."

"And what can this boy do for you?" said Reason. "He can add nothing to your position or importance: on the contrary, he will draw down upon you the world's censure and ridicule; whereas a marriage with Lord Harley would be suitable and desirable in every respect: it would have the approval of your own common sense and of the world at large."

Why marry at all? But Olga had grown tired of the loneliness of her life, and felt a positive necessity for changing it. She would have liked to keep Leo away: it went to her heart to see how he suffered from his jealousy of Lord Harley, and how manfully he struggled to conceal it.

"Do you know, Mrs. Stratheden," said Lord Harley, one day, in the low, well-bred tone that was habitual to him, "I always gave you credit for being free from the cruelties of your sex?"

"And what has happened to convince you of your error?" asked Olga, smiling.

"Young Vyner. Poor lad! I feel quite sorry for him. You must see how devoted he is to you, and how dreadfully he suffers from seeing any one else approach you. Don't you think it would be kinder to put him out of his misery at once than to keep him hanging about in his present state of mind?"

Olga's face is dyed with blushes. She feels confused, exasperated, in one. The low, calm tones of Lord Harley's voice, and the clear indication in them of the security he feels in his

own position and the hopelessness of Leo's, jar upon her inexpressibly. For a moment she feels tempted to retort, "I have given my whole heart to that *poor lad*, and am capable of committing the greatest folly for his sake;" but prudence restrains her: she would not care to meet the incredulous smile, the politely restrained scorn, that would greet such a confession on her part. Besides, has she not resolved that she and Leo shall never be more to each other than they are now? So she merely said, with assumed carelessness,—

"Do you really think he is in love with me?"

"I see you are a *very* woman," remarked Lord Harley, and smiled. "After all, how could anything be perfect unless it possessed all the attributes natural to it?"

"And the attributes with which you endow me at the present moment are cruelty and hypocrisy, are they not?" asked Olga.

"Do not put it so harshly. But, if you pretend to ignore that poor young fellow's devotion, I must at least think your modesty makes you insincere."

"He will soon be cured of it," remarked Olga, hoping to be contradicted; but Lord Harley bowed assent.

"But it is very bitter whilst it lasts."

"Whilst it lasts! whilst it lasts!" repeated Olga, in a low, scornful tone. "Pray, Lord Harley, does a man's love ever last? and if so, what is the longest term of its duration?"

"I think a man's love is capable of lasting his life, when he forms it after arriving at mature age, and it is not merely an ephemeral passion, but a sentiment approved by his judgment," replied Lord Harley, looking at Olga with an expression which indicated that he himself illustrated the truth of what he affirmed.

"I don't call that love," uttered Olga,—"the calm, calculating feeling that says, 'This woman suits me, I will make her my wife.' In love there must be passion, fervor, doubt." And she raises eloquent eyes to his face, not thinking of him at all, nor how he may interpret her words. How he does interpret them is evident the next moment.

"Do you think," he says, taking her hand quickly, "that any man who loved you would be lacking either in passion or fervor if you gave him the right to feel it?"

A horrible feeling of repulsion comes over Olga. She, the

self-possessed, dignified woman of the world, starts up and flies out of the room, as the veriest school-girl might do on a similar occasion. She is burning with disgust and anger,—anger chiefly against herself.

"Oh, Leo, Leo! why are you not ten years older?" she murmurs.

Meantime, Leo is undergoing torments to which his previous sufferings had been as nothing. To think that Olga could not be his was pain keen enough; to think she might be another's was agony unspeakable. And he could not but acknowledge that in every way Lord Harley was perfectly suited to her, and a man calculated to inspire the respect and affection of any woman. And, besides this, he had every other advantage,—rank, position, wealth. "If I stay I shall go mad," he said to himself every day; and yet he felt it impossible to go away in doubt. "When it is settled, I will go," he determined; but he had too much delicacy to ask any questions of Olga.

Raymond was in town, and they often met. He was in love too; but, as the object of his passion was not legitimate, he could not very well pour out his woes to his friend, and Leo would on no account have profaned his idol by discussing her with Raymond. One day, at Little Bridge, Leo was introduced to Lady Bergholt, who received him very graciously. She was displeased with Raymond for some cause or other, and revenged herself in her usual manner, by making herself extremely agreeable to some one else. As Leo was a fine-looking young fellow, well dressed and likely to be a credit to her, she turned her attentions to him, insisted upon driving him home, and invited him to dine and go to the Opera with them.

Mignon was one of those people who delight in being gracious to one person at the expense of another. On this occasion Raymond was the sufferer by her kindness to his friend.

"I dare say Mr. Vyner will relieve you of your attendance upon us to-night, Mr. L'Estrange," she said, with a sweet smile, the sweeter because she knew she was tormenting her unhappy victim. "You were saying just now it would be so something hot at the Opera—what was the word you used? infernally, I think. *You* won't mind it being infernally hot, Mr. Vyner, will you? and if you do, you will put up with a little incon-

venience in a good cause? You look good-tempered; not like poor Mr. L'Estrange: he is quite a martyr to his temper: so are his friends."

All this with rippling, bewitching smiles, which to have resisted, a man must have been more than mortal. Leo thought her lovely, and was very well pleased to accept her invitation. Raymond, on the contrary, scowled, and his handsome features were twisted almost out of their beauty by his wrath.

"I have no doubt Mr. Vyner will not only attend you to-night, but accompany you home now," he said, furiously. "You seem so mutually charmed, I should be sorry to be *de trop*." And he turned to walk away. But Leo linked his arm in his, and kept him there.

"Come, Raymond," he said, good-naturedly, "I cannot afford to lose an old friend because I have made a new one. Don't punish him too much, Lady Bergholt. I am sure the most tropical heat at the Opera would be less cruel to him than the frost of your displeasure." He spoke gayly for the sake of saying something, not because he was aware of the state of his friend's feelings.

But all the way home Mignon continued to sting Raymond with darts and thrusts, every one of which goaded him to more wrathful indignation. In vain Lady Clover and Leo good-humoredly interposed: Mignon was bewitchingly, merrily, imperturbably spiteful; Raymond bitter, angry, furious in proportion.

"Mr. Vyner," says Mignon, "do you think it would be any use my stopping at a bonbon-shop for Mr. L'Estrange? I have heard that sweets put fractious children in a good humor sometimes."

"If you infused a little more sweetness into your remarks. it might be efficacious," retorted Raymond, looking daggers at her.

"Now, Mr. Vyner, I appeal to you," cried Mignon, "have I said anything that is not sweet? Mr. L'Estrange is bilious, I think: everything turns acid upon him. I am thankful to say my husband is not of a bilious temperament: it must be dreadful to have a bilious husband. Kitty, my dear, you had a narrow escape in not marrying Mr. L'Estrange: if he is so terribly cross with his friends, what would he be with a wife?"

It was impossible for Leo and Kitty to help laughing at

Mignon's kittenish mischievousness, but with Raymond it was no laughing-matter. For the time being, his love was turned into hatred, as love which is not pure will turn when it is wounded. Mignon continued her provocations all through dinner, until Raymond took refuge in sullen silence. Sir Tristram was dining at Greenwich with Fred Conyngham; Sir Josias, whom the Opera bored, was dutifully devoting the evening to his mother: so the four young people dined and went to the Opera together. Here matters grew worse. Raymond was ousted from his usual place behind Lady Bergholt's chair, and Leo reigned in his stead. Mignon had nothing of the least importance to say to him; truth to tell, she found him rather heavy, since he did not pour into her ear the exaggerated flatteries to which she was accustomed; but all the same she wreathed her face in bewitching smiles and turned frequently to whisper to him, with the amiable intention of annoying Raymond.

"Mr. L'Estrange," she said, sweetly, as he was about to leave the box, "will you tell Lord Threestars that I want him, if you happen to see him?"

"Certainly," answered Raymond, stiffly, changing his mind about going, and resuming his seat; "though what on earth any one can see in an ass like that is beyond me."

"He is so good-looking, and he has a title," answered Mignon; then, with a look of the raciest impertinence at Raymond, she added, "Of the two, I think an ass with a title is preferable to one without."

"Thank you," said Raymond, fiercely. "I suppose that is intended for me."

"But I did not say Lord Threestars was an ass," answered Mignon, sweetly. "On the contrary, I think him charming."

This was too much for Raymond, and he retired in high dudgeon.

"Really, Mignon, you are too bad!" cried Lady Clover. "Why do you take such delight in teasing that poor boy?"

"My dear," Lady Bergholt made answer, with a face of imperturbable gravity, "I am trying to smooth the way a little for his poor wife when he gets one: he must not be encouraged in his overbearing ways."

CHAPTER XXV.

"He said, and his observation was just, that a man on whom Heaven hath bestowed a beautiful wife, should be as cautious of the men he brings home to his house, as careful of observing the female friends with whom his spouse converses abroad. . . . Wherefore Lothario observed, every married man has occasion for some friend to apprise him of any omission in her conduct; for it often happens that he is too much in love with his wife to observe, or too much afraid of offending her to prescribe the limits of, her behavior in those things the following or eschewing of which may tend to his honor or reproach, whereas that inconvenience might be easily amended by the advice of a friend."

CERVANTES.

SOME one enters the box, and Kitty turns her attention to the new-comer. "By the way," asks Mignon, leaning back and speaking in a low tone to Leo, "is there not some romantic story about your getting shot at Mrs. Stratheden's and her sucking the poison out of your wound, or doing something equally wonderful?"

"Mrs. Stratheden saved my life," answers Leo, his eyes lighting up as they always do when her name is mentioned. And, being young and ignorant, he proceeds to expatiate upon Olga's heroism, thinking, because his interlocutor is a woman and young and beautiful, he is secure of her sympathy.

"How horrid!" utters Mignon, with a shiver of disgust. "She must be very strong-minded."

There is an indescribable accent of depreciation in her voice, as though Mrs. Stratheden had committed an unfeminine action, shocking to the feelings of her sex. Leo feels as though he had been suddenly plunged into cold water.

"*I* could not have done such a thing," proceeds the fair one, with a little meritorious air; "but I believe people's nerves get strong as they get old."

Leo makes no answer: he is positively stupefied.

"What do you think of her?" continues Mignon, in an indifferent tone, as though the subject were not very engrossing. "Lady-like, but *passée*, is she not? and fancies herself enormously?"

Mignon has an uncontrollable spite against Mrs. Stratheden: it breaks out whenever her name is mentioned. She has gathered from Leo's manner that he admires her, and resents it.

Leo pulls himself together after the wrench his feelings have sustained. He has been charmed by Lady Bergholt and dazzled by her beauty, but in the space of thirty seconds all her charm is gone, he feels towards her as he might have done towards some lovely Lamia who had suddenly revealed herself in her natural shape.

"I think Mrs. Stratheden simply the most perfect woman *in every way* that I ever met," he says, in tones of suppressed passion.

From that moment Mignon hates him.

"Really!" she says, raising her eyebrows, and reflecting how she may best hurt him. "Ah, I think I remember hearing you had fallen desperately in love with her. How odd it is that boys always fall in love with women old enough to be their mothers! I suppose it is a dreadful blow to you that she is going to marry Lord Harley."

Mercifully for Leo, the door opens, and Lord Threestars comes in. From that moment, Mignon ignores every one else, and Leo gladly takes the chair by Lady Clover.

"Did I hear Mrs. Stratheden's name?" she asks him; "and do you know her? Is she not charming? Was it really you whose life she saved? Ah! she is a woman in ten thousand. I love her better than any one I know."

The mantle of Mignon's loveliness has fallen on Kitty's shoulders, at least in Leo's eyes.

"She is not a bit spiteful or little-minded, as a great many of us are, I am afraid," pursues Lady Clover, with an enthusiasm that is perfectly genuine. "And you have no idea how much good she does among the poor, and how kind she is. They say her estate is the best managed and her people the best off in Blankshire. She sees to everything herself, and won't leave it to her steward. I wonder she has never married," Kitty rattles on: "she would make the most charming wife in the world. If I were a man, I should fall on my knees before her and stop there until she consented to marry me."

"Is it true that she is going to marry Lord Harley?" asks Leo, in a low, faltering voice.

"I do not know. She denied it when I asked her; but then we always do that sort of thing, you know, until everything is definitively settled," answers Kitty, with an oracular nod. "It would be a charming match,—so perfectly suitable in every way."

Leo is so acutely conscious of the truth of this remark that he can make no answer to it.

Raymond only reappears at the closing scene of the opera. Lord Threestars has left some time ago, and Lady Bergholt is so much disgusted with Leo that she takes Raymond back into her favor, lets him put on her cloak, smiles upon him, and sends him up from his wrath into a seventh heaven.

"Let's walk as far as Pratt's!" he says to Leo, after they have put the ladies into their carriages. "Is she not lovely?"

"Very," replies Leo, in a curt, cold tone, that seems to grudge the praise it cannot but give.

"She is the loveliest woman in England!" says Raymond, with an enthusiasm which makes ample amends for Leo's coolness. "Can't you understand a man losing his head about a creature like that?"

Leo looks at him, and answers, frankly,—

"I cannot understand any man losing his head about a woman who is another man's wife."

"Most virtuous rustic!" scoffs Raymond, gayly. "Have you not lived long enough in society to see how small an obstacle a husband is in this happy age? I assure you Sir Tristram isn't half as much in my way as that conceited fool Threestars."

"Of course I know you are jesting," Leo answers, gravely; "but don't you think it's a pity to talk like that about a woman whom you admire? It must lower her even in your own estimation."

Raymond becomes intensely serious at once.

"I may have spoken in a jesting tone," he says, "but God knows it is true that I worship the ground that woman walks on, and that at times I feel as near as a man can do to blowing my brains out about her."

"Then," Leo answers, sternly, "I can no more understand a man giving way to such a feeling for his friend's wife than I could understand his stealing the jewels from his safe, or the horses out of his stable."

"How can you help it," retorts Raymond, passionately, "if you meet a woman too late, when accident has made her the wife of another man? It was a shameful marriage, tying a young thing like that to a man much more than double her own age: it is more,—it is a sacrifice revolting to human nature."

"From all I hear," says Leo, "Lady Bergholt married her husband of her own free will, and with her eyes open. She seems perfectly happy, and most keenly alive to the privileges of her wealth and station."

"She was such a child," mutters Raymond; "she did not know what love was."

"And do you want to teach her? Do you want to sow the seeds of unlawful passion in her heart, and change her from the light-hearted girl she is now to a miserable, guilty, despised creature? If that is your idea of love, I confess I *don't* understand it."

"It is all very well for you to talk, who have not been tempted," answers Raymond, scornfully. "Try and put yourself in my place. Suppose Mrs. Stratheden were married, instead of being free as she is."

"Do not bring her name in," mutters Leo, huskily. "*I know* this, that no power on earth should induce me to harm a hair of the woman's head I loved."

"Fine doctrine!" scoffs Raymond. "And *I know* that love is a thing uncontrollable, and that when two beings meet whom nature has destined for each other, all must go down before it, whether it be rank, or social ties, or" (in a low voice) "even the marriage bond itself."

Leo turns to look at his friend, and sees a face so marred and changed with passion that he is absolutely aghast.

"For heaven's sake, Raymond," he says, with great earnestness, "don't give way to thoughts like these! Haven't we had instances enough lately of this sort of thing and its results? Why, you and Lady Bergholt are the last people in the world to suit each other, even if you had met when you were both free."

"You only judge by her little capricious ways," says Raymond: "they mean nothing, and I am a fool to be put out by them. I believe" (lowering his voice) "they are only assumed to conceal her real feelings."

Leo does not believe anything of the sort. He believes that, fortunately for herself and all parties concerned, Lady Bergholt has no passion but vanity, and that she is in her heart as indifferent to Raymond as even her husband could wish her, and is simply amusing herself at his expense. But Leo is wise enough to keep his opinion to himself; no man who imagines himself the victim of a *grande passion* likes to be told that the object of his devotion does not care two straws about him, least of all a man like Raymond.

So he says, "My dear old fellow, why don't you put yourself out of the way of temptation? If it is as bad as all this, nothing less than the Atlantic is wide enough to separate you from her. Come with me: I have made up my mind to go, and will start at once, if you will go with me."

But Raymond is a spoiled child who sees no beauty in self-sacrifice. His eyes kindle, and there is the fervor of strong passion in his voice, as he answers,—

"Why should one fly from the prospect of the most exquisite happiness that life can give?"

"When I was quite a lad," says Leo, with apparent irrelevancy, "I was staying in the house with a husband and wife. I never saw two people hate each other in the way they did. I don't think boys, as a rule, notice those things very much, but it used to take away my appetite only to listen to the things they said to each other. There was no vulgar quarrelling, but every word conveyed some cutting sting, and the hatred in their eyes was unmistakable. Years afterwards I heard their story. She had run away from her husband with this man: it had been a case of the most violent infatuation on both sides. The first husband got a divorce: it was the man who probably said, as you do, that nature had destined them for each other who was her husband when I met her. And forgive me, old fellow, for saying so, but it is just such a couple I fancy you and Lady Bergholt would make if—as I trust in heaven they won't—your present desires could be fulfilled."

Raymond laughs lightly.

"As I said before," he answers, "you judge from the silly, childish nonsense you saw to-day. If ever my darling should be mine, you will see how you misjudged us."

"You do not love her," says Leo, hotly, "or you would not dishonor her by speaking of such a possibility to another man."

"Before you judge others, wait until you are in the same position yourself. You may be before long," utters Raymond, significantly.

A hot flush overspreads Leo's face.

"I don't want to make myself out better than other men," he says, "but sooner than bring disgrace or dishonor on the head of the woman I love, I would put a bullet through my brain."

"It is very easy to talk," remarks Raymond, contemptuously; and so they part.

On the same evening Sir Tristram and Fred Conyngham are dining together at the Trafalgar at Greenwich,—their first *tête-à-tête* dinner since the marriage. Fred does not frequent his friend's house much: there is little love lost between him and Mignon. A very few meetings sufficed to show her that he had played the wolf in sheep's clothing on the day when he entertained her and Regina at lunch, and she is perfectly aware that he disapproves *almost* everything about her but her beauty. The feeling is more than reciprocated. She dislikes *everything* in him: his sarcasms penetrate and sting her: she is not witty, and, in her endeavor to retaliate, is not unfrequently rude. Never will she forgive him a remark provoked one day by her contemptuous treatment of Sir Tristram and himself, "two dried-up old fogies," as she politely called them.

"It is quite right for beauty and youth to arrogate themselves," said Fred, looking at the lovely, scornful face before him, "since they are entirely due to the meritorious efforts of those who possess them, and are imperishable."

"Anyhow, it is better to be young and lovely than old and plain, don't you think?" asked Mignon, maliciously.

"Perhaps," Fred answered, letting fall on her one of those calm, reflective glances that his friends, much more his foes, know to be dangerous. "And yet, I sometimes think, God gives great beauty to some women as a sort of compensation for having denied them every other grace."

Mignon blushed scarlet. The victory remained with Fred; but it cost him dear.

Sir Tristram is sorely vexed at this antagonism between the two people whom of all others he would like to see friends: it seems to him that Mignon never appears to so little advantage as when Fred is present, and the only time he ever feels dis

posed to be angry with his friend is when he is exercising his satire upon Mignon.

Fred groans inwardly as he sees how entirely Sir Tristram is subjugated by his lovely wife: he anathematizes his folly, and soliloquizes jeremiads as to the future.

"The old proverb," he reflects. "Set a beggar on horseback, and he will ride to the devil. If the beggar is of the female sex, so much the sooner will she arrive at her destination, and so many the more companions will she carry along with her. Why should a man turn fool because a woman is fair? a man in the prime of life, in the zenith of his understanding. A few grains more of white and red in the skin, a shade more color in the eyes, an imperceptible increase in the usual length of an eyelash, a curve here, a straight line there, —to think that upon these trifles hangs a woman's power over a man, the power of turning him from a reasoning being to a fool! Bah! I hate pretty women!" (with a gesture of disgust). "A woman has a small red mouth and regular teeth, and she may laugh from morning to night at the greatest inanities or the most serious subjects without being taken for the idiot she is." (No doubt Fred is thinking of Mignon.) "She may be heartless, ignorant, rude,—no matter: she has a crowd of fools to admire her and take the toads that fall from her mouth for pearls and diamonds. What good have beautiful women ever done? Only set the world by the ears, as far as I know. Poor old Tristram! he is so proud because he owns this lovely bit of flesh and blood! Owns it, indeed! rather it owns him; and a pretty tyrant he will find it before long, if he does not already. Minx! to think he took her from her cottage home and her shabby frocks, and now she is by way of flinging his money out of windows with both hands. Poor Tristram! Why could not that drivelling old uncle have left his money to charities, instead of to a man who didn't want it? and then my lady would have been wandering about the Surrey lanes in her old frock to this day, and I should still have possessed a friend. Ah!" (sighing), "we shall never be David and Jonathan any more, never love each other with the love passing the love of women. Perhaps, though, if women in David's time had been like they are now, the two wouldn't have been friends so long!"

Dinner is over, and the two men are sitting by the open

window, watching the big, brown-sailed barges glide by. It is high tide; the breeze makes a strong ripple on the water; twilight is creeping on; lights come out here and there: altogether, it is a picturesque scene. Happily for the guests, the urchins cannot turn it into Pandemonium to-night with their weird capers in the mud and their shrill rasping cries of "Chuck out, sir."

There is not a great deal of conversation between the friends: each is conscious of a slight *gêne*, which one deplores and the other is half disposed to resent.

There has been silence for a few minutes, during which each has puffed thoughtfully at his cigar with a more reflective air than is entirely due to an unexceptionable dinner. Fred is the first to break it. From his tone, it is evident that his remark is no irrelevant one, but a continuation aloud of his thoughts.

"Well, Tristram, is it a perfect success?"

A little cloud crosses his friend's face, as though he would rather the subject had not been mooted. But he answers, with slow gravity,—

"Well, yes, I think I may say it is."

"And you don't regret it? don't wish it undone? don't think lingeringly of this time last year?"

"No."

"Then you are *perfectly* happy?"

Sir Tristram smiles his pleasant smile.

"My dear Fred, is any one *perfectly* happy? Are you *perfectly* happy?"

"I! Of course not," says Fred, with a touch of sarcasm; "but then I am a poor devil of a bachelor. I thought the possession of a lovely woman whom one adored was supposed to confer utter and perfect bliss."

"My dear old Fred, do you think life would be worth having if one did not indulge extravagant anticipations sometimes? I know what you want: you want me to say, 'You were right, and I was wrong. I was a fool, and I humble myself before your superior wisdom in sackcloth and ashes.' But I cannot say anything of the sort. I do not regret my marriage in the very least; and if the time had to come over again, I should do exactly the same."

"Oh, then, that is all right," replied Fred, in a tone which,

however, betrays very little satisfaction. There is a pause, broken presently by Sir Tristram.

"You are prejudiced against my wife, Fred, and I cannot tell you how it grieves me. You might, for the sake of old times, try to conquer it and feel kindly towards her."

"It is just for the sake of old times that I can't conquer it," answered Fred, brusquely. "If, having married the best fellow in the world, she was grateful to him for the benefits he heaps upon her and tried to make him happy or studied anything earthly but herself, I should be ready to think her perfect too; but when I see——"

"Don't, Fred!" interposes Sir Tristram, hastily. "I could not bear a word against her, even from you; and you must not judge by the little petulant ways you have seen. I don't know how it is, but there seems an inborn antagonism between you two: each appears to have the knack of making the other show to the least advantage."

"Our antagonism is very easily explained," replies Fred. "Lady Bergholt abhors any one who is too candid to feed her with sugared lies and who does not seem to think all she says and does perfect; and I hate equally to see a woman trading upon her beauty and using it to attain her own selfish ends and to ride rough-shod over other people's feelings."

"You are unjust," says Sir Tristram, warmly. "It is only natural that so very lovely a woman should be a little spoiled: every one conspires to make her so."

"Then I like to be different from every one. Do you suppose people will feel the same toleration for her caprices fifteen or twenty years hence? for you know the faults and follies don't fade with the beauty, but only become more accentuated. That is the sort of woman you may see any day in the Park, at races, balls,—everywhere, in fact,—painted and dyed, ridiculed and despised, agonizing after her lost youth, struggling vainly to combat Time's handiwork. This is what fools make of pretty women, and what, thank God, I have not on *my* conscience. A woman ought to be taught what a gracious thing beauty is when modestly worn, not to make it a cloak for the most odious selfishness and disregard of others."

Sir Tristram smiles.

"My dear Fred, I am not going to quarrel with you. I think you are jealous. And indeed you look at the dark side

of the picture, and forget what a charming thing it is for a man who has passed his youth to have the constant presence of a lovely fresh young girl, and to feel, when you see all the admiration she excites, that you are the happy possessor of so much beauty."

Fred looks up shrewdly.

"I confess," he answers, "that being a man who has passed his youth, it would not give me pleasure to see my wife perpetually surrounded by men who have not,—young L'Estrange, for instance."

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Yet did I see Apame sitting at the right hand of the king.

"And taking the crown from the king's head, and setting it upon her own head, she also struck the king with her left hand.

"And yet for all this the king gaped and gazed upon her with open mouth: if she laughed upon him, he laughed also, but if she took any displeasure at him, the king was fain to flatter that she might be reconciled to him again.

"O ye men, how can it be but women should be strong, seeing they do thus?"

Book of Esdras.

A CLOUD gathers on Sir Tristram's brow.

"Fred," he says, presently, with a quiver about the muscles of his mouth, "I can hardly imagine that you asked me to dine with you to-night for the sake of saying things it would pain me to hear."

"No, upon my soul!" answers Fred, "you would hardly think that of me. I don't believe any one on this earth loves you half so heartily as I do, or would do as much for you. That is just why I take upon myself the unpleasant task of Mentor. I *have* something to say to you: say I am wrong, think I am wrong, but still let me put in my word of warning. I understand your motives thoroughly, I know they are all generous and good, but there is an old saying, 'Be just before you are generous.' You have taken a young girl from a comparatively obscure position, and given her what to her must be wealth unbounded and perfect liberty. More than that, you have

surrounded her with temptations. Now, it must be a very wise and a very strong head that would not be turned by all this. Don't you think, Tristram, that you have incurred an immense responsibility?"

A pained look comes into the deep-gray eyes.

"Now that you speak out frankly and fairly," says Sir Tristram, in a low voice, "I will answer you in the same spirit. Yes, I *do* think it is a heavy responsibility, and I suffer more than I can tell you from the thought. For my own sake, I have not a single regret about my marriage; I thank God for my happiness every day; but I *do* regret it bitterly at times for hers. I had a wild idea that I should be able to inspire her with something like the love I felt myself. I was a fool for thinking so: what should a gay light-hearted young girl feel for a man older than her father, except perhaps a good-natured toleration, or, if he is worthy of it, a dull respect? What can she do when she is surrounded by good-looking, cheery young fellows but contrast them with me, and accuse me in her heart of having cut her off from the love and happiness she might otherwise have known? That is why I leave her unrestrained; that is why I let other men come and go as they will; that is why I school myself to bear the pain of seeing her smile and look glad when other men approach her."

Fred is more touched than he would care to show.

"It is a noble idea," he says, "but a very Quixotic one, and it is open to two interpretations. A man has no business to seem careless of his wife's honor. Be sure no one gives him credit for such chivalrous sentiments as yours. A young, inexperienced girl like Lady Bergholt, who cannot yet know much of the world's ways, wants to be guided by some one who does: if you allow her free and unrestrained intercourse with young men, you will have no right to complain if you discover one day that the men have abused your friendship, and your wife your confidence. I know what I have said scores of times about giving advice to a friend, and about meddling with matters that don't concern me, but when it is your own familiar friend, as Jonathan was to David, it is different." And Fred gulps down his very unusual emotion.

"Are you still thinking of Raymond L'Estrange?" asks Sir Tristram, in a low voice.

"Yes, I am," Fred answers, firmly. "I do not believe for an instant that your wife cares two straws for him; but no one can see them together for ten minutes without being perfectly aware of what his feelings are for her; and it can hardly be an edifying sight for a husband, or his friends, however great a tribute it may be to the lady's charms."

"What can I do?" asks Sir Tristram, in a pained voice. "Of course I have seen it; I have felt almost sorry for him, poor lad, to see how Mignon teases and torments him. I am perfectly certain she cares nothing for him now; and it seemed to me that if I made any remark about it, or prevented his coming so often to the house, it might awaken her interest in him."

"I would *not* have him hanging about in the way he does," said Fred, resolutely. "Take my word for it, that too much confidence and generosity, where those you are dealing with do not possess an equal degree of it, may have much the same result as foolhardiness."

Further conversation is put a stop to by an intimation that the phaeton is at the door, and an over-charge in the bill sends Fred's thoughts into another current. Not so with Sir Tristram: he broods over the matter all the way to town, and in his study after he has reached home. My lady has not returned, and her husband sits, nervous and wretched, trying to "screw his courage to the sticking-point." Half an hour after midnight, Mignon comes in, radiant and good-humored: to take advantage of her mood seems an act of meanness, but Sir Tristram feels as though it must be done.

He waits until he thinks the maid will have performed the task of brushing out the golden locks,—no easy one, as my lady is intolerant of the slightest jerk from the comb,—and then knocks diffidently at her door.

"Come in. Pray, are you going to sit up all night?" asks Mignon, with wide-open eyes, as she remarks that he is still in evening dress. "Is anybody dead?—are you going to a funeral? or are you trying to get your face to an expression befitting the Sabbath?"

"I only want to speak to you, dear, when you are disengaged."

"Is it anything you cannot say before Nowell? Really, I feel quite nervous. Make haste and go, Nowell! No, stay.

I don't think it *can* be so important as my hair. Would you mind coming back in ten minutes, Tristram?"

"May I not stay and see the operation?" he says, coming forward and looking lovingly at the wealth of golden hair spread over the fair shoulders. He thinks of the old lines again,—

> "Entre or et roux
> Dieu fit ses longs cheveux."

"Certainly not," replies the fair one, imperiously, whilst her Abigail makes the reflection that she "wouldn't be hordered about so" if she were Sir Tristram.

When he returns, my lady receives him with a yawn, and a less amiable expression of countenance. Having reflected upon the matter, she has come to the conclusion that she is going to be found fault with.

"My darling," he says, taking her reluctant hand and stooping to kiss her, "I want to say something to you. I am going to blame, not you, but myself; and I want you to listen to me for a moment."

"Well?" remarks Mignon, in a tone that is the furthest remove from inviting a confidence.

Sir Tristram does not feel encouraged; but he has put his hand to the plough and must go on.

"I have," he proceeds, with some nervous hesitation, "as I think I have proved to you, my dear child, the most perfect confidence in you." And he fills up the pause by kissing the slim hand that is perfectly unresponsive.

"I have not the slightest idea what you are going to say," remarks Mignon, coolly, "but I am perfectly certain that whatever you have in your head was put there by your delightful friend Mr. Conyngham."

Sir Tristram stands convicted.

"It is nothing," he says, awkwardly, "but what was there before. Do not be angry: it is no reflection on you: on the contrary, it is a tribute to your loveliness. I cannot expect that what I find beautiful and sweet will not seem so to others."

"Pray come to the point," says Mignon, in a hard voice, with smouldering fire in her eyes. "Is it Lord Threestars or Mr. L'Estrange?"

"My dear," answers Sir Tristram, already feeling a touch of remorse, and anxious to avoid wounding her feelings in the

smallest degree, "no one is more glad and proud than I am to see you admired; but you are so young, you know nothing about the world, and people are so censorious."

Mignon is all ablaze with wrath: she has been a tyrant ever since her marriage, and has no idea of yielding up a fraction of her despotic sway. So she breaks out,—

"That hateful man has been telling lies about me! that is what he asked you to dinner for. I suspected as much. He shall never, *never* come into the house again while I am here. Why did you marry me? You know I did not want to marry you, and you promised me that I should do just as I liked and go everywhere and amuse myself. And now I dare say you want to shut me up and keep me from seeing any one; but I will kill myself first. Send me home. I was happy before I knew you."

Now, if Sir Tristram had been a sensible man and known how to manage my lady, he would have taken her at her word, and said, "Very well, my dear: if you think you would be happier at home, by all means go there;" and Madame Mignon, who had not the slightest idea of leaving all the desirable things her husband provided, would have abated somewhat of her violence, and perhaps become humble and submissive. It is a great mercy for some people who talk big and bluster, that others don't know how easily they might be brought down from their pinnacle; but, then, if every one knew how to manage every one else, life would not be the exciting and turbulent affair it is. You, for instance, madame, when you have quarrelled with your lover and bade him begone and never see you more, you know that did he but get as far as the hall door you would make some excuse to call him back; but he, poor fellow! does not know it, and so, instead of taking his hat and feigning to depart, he remains to plead and to be browbeaten.

So in the case of Mignon and Sir Tristram: it is the girl who knows how to manage the man, and the man of the world who is a mere plaything in the girl's hands.

"My dearest," he says, penitently, trying to take her in his arms, an attention which she most vigorously and successfully resists, "what you say is true. I promised you you should have all the pleasure I could procure for you; and I will keep my word. Henceforth, do as you please: I leave my honor in your hands: I will never interfere with you again."

Mignon completes her victory by a burst of angry tears, and by ordering her victim out of her sight. When he is gone, she throws her lovely head upon the pillow, and in five minutes is sleeping the sleep of youth and innocence.

I can imagine I hear the reader say, "What a fool the man must have been!" But pray, sir, if you were never made a fool of by a lovely woman yourself, have you not read of many brave and wise and gallant gentlemen who have been?

The next day is Sunday. Mignon takes her breakfast in bed, and declines to accompany her husband to church. At lunch she sulks, and behaves as though, instead of being the most indulgent, generous husband in the world, he were a cruel tyrant. Raymond comes in presently, and—will any one believe it?—in his anxiety to propitiate his lovely wife, Sir Tristram proposes that they shall all three drive down to Richmond and dine. Unkind fate ordains that Fred Conyngham shall also be dining with a select party at the Star and Garter, and that he shall come full tilt on Raymond and Mignon pensively contemplating the silver Thames from one of the terraces. Mignon, hearing footsteps, turns, and sees Mr. Conyngham, who lifts his hat. She looks him full in the face, "tiptilts" her charming, impertinent nose, and cuts him dead. Fred understands all, and groans in spirit.

"Lend me a pencil!" he says to the man who is with him. "I want to write myself 'an ass.'"

"Why?" asks his companion.

"Because, on the strength of thirty-five years' friendship, I gave a man some good advice. Hear my vow!" And he strikes a tragic attitude. "By every gudgeon in the Thames, by every separate whitebait cooked to-night, by every hair in Mademoiselle Zephine's golden chignon, by every drop of wine that will make to-night's feast cursed in the memory to-morrow, I swear never to breathe one word of counsel to any human being from this time forth!"

"Amen!" responds the other: "it is the only way to get through life, and I should have given you credit for knowing that better than most men."

Mignon's perversity, for which, however, she must not be too severely condemned, since it is a failing particularly common to man in his fallen estate, causes her to regard Raymond with more than usual interest, and to treat him with a kind-

ness and gentleness that make him, as Balzac says, "*entrevoir les roses du septième ciel.*"

And Sir Tristram looks on and smiles, and stifles down the pain that gnaws his generous heart as he watches them together and feels that in their youth and beauty they are fitly matched. The thought that in a few days' time they are to leave London for Bergholt Court brings little consolation with it: Raymond's place is barely five miles distant, and he will have even more opportunity of being with Mignon and alone with her than he has in London.

It is arranged that they leave for the North the first week in July; and the idea of seeing her stately home, and of the reception to be given them by the neighbors and tenants, has prevented Mignon regretting the gayeties she will leave behind. She will be a very grand personage on this occasion; indeed, it will be almost a royal progress; and she will apparel herself beautifully, and bestow liberal and most gracious smiles on all around, and win the heart of every beholder. As she drives in the Park, she studies the manner of the most gracious princess in the world, and finds herself practising those sweet little bows in private which she will accompany with the sunniest smiles.

I spare the reader details of how all these anticipations were carried out: was it not chronicled in many columns of the county paper, abridged in the Court Journal and many other fashionable papers? Mignon cut it all out and put it in her desk, along with the announcement of her presentation at Court, and various paragraphs mentioning her name, with those of other great people, at various fashionable and important *réunions.* She read with great satisfaction of "the exquisite beauty of Lady Bergholt, enhanced by the most bewitching of toilettes," of "the angelic sweetness of her smile, which, if for once appearances might be judged by, must, in the possession of so amiable and lovely a partner, make Sir Tristram the happiest and most enviable man in Christendom."

For the first few days, pleased with the excitement, and dazzled by the magnitude of her possessions, Mignon was radiant with pleasure and good temper. It was Sir Tristram's turn to "catch a glimpse of the roses in the seventh heaven;" and, indeed, it was the very happiest time he had spent since his marriage: "in his lifetime," he told himself.

But when the novelty had worn off, when "custom" had "staled" the variety, Mignon began to yawn.

"Couldn't we have some people to stay?" she asks her husband at breakfast one morning; and, with this, a cloud draws over the blue gates of his heaven and shuts out the sight of the roses. His programme had been to have Mignon all to himself for one happy fortnight, then to ask her family for a month, during which time there would doubtless be exchanges of civilities and hospitalities between the other county families and themselves, and then a succession of visitors in the house for shooting.

"One cannot very well ask people at this time, when there is nothing to do in the country," he answers, with a shade of disappointment which he feels it impossible to conceal.

"It was a great mistake," says Mignon, her face clouding, "being in such a hurry to come here. A month later would have done quite as well, and we should not have missed Goodwood and Cowes."

"Your people will be coming in a week," remarks her husband, trying to speak cheerfully.

"One's family is always so very enlivening," retorts Mignon, with a toss of her head.

"And you want to learn to ride and drive, you know, before your guests come. Your horse arrives to-day, and the cobs to-morrow."

"What on earth shall I do all day?" says Mignon, pushing back her chair and yawning. "Only ten minutes to eleven!"

"Don't ladies sometimes do needlework?" asks Sir Tristram, diffidently.

"Needlework!" (contemptuously). "What do you mean? Hemming dusters, or making clothes for the poor?"

"No: I mean what I think you call fancy work,—cutting out holes and sewing them up again, or wool-work. My mother worked all the chairs in the morning room."

"Ah!" says Mignon, dryly; "her picture gives me exactly that idea: she looks like a woman who would do wool-work. I dare say she had Dorcas meetings, and superintended the village school."

"My love," says Sir Tristram, gravely, "my mother is a very sacred subject with me."

Mignon has not a grain of veneration.

"Well," she laughs, "is there anything profane in supposing that she occupied herself with good works?"

"I wish, darling," he remarks, "that your inclination lay a little more that way."

"Oh, pray do not begin that twaddle!" she exclaims, with a gesture of disgust. "Of course you are getting old, and it is natural you should take a serious view of things; but, for heaven's sake, don't make me more dull and wretched than I am already, by lecturing me."

Dull and wretched! Poor Sir Tristram! O men who have passed your meridian, take warning, and, if you would not know such pain as those words gave their hearer, do not seek a lovely, mischievous young girl of seventeen to wife!

The door opens: enter the butler.

"If you please, my lady, Mr. L'Estrange is in the morning room."

Mignon claps her hands.

"This is delightful!" she cries, rushing to the glass and taking a coquettish survey of her appearance, perfectly unmindful of the indecorum of a married woman being so jubilant at the announcement of a male visitor.

She trips off, all smiles.

"I *am* glad to see you," she cries, cordially, putting out both hands to him; "this *is* an agreeable surprise. I was on the point of committing suicide. I *am* glad!"

For the punishment of his sins, Sir Tristram, who has followed her, hears the last two sentences.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"PHILASTER. . . . . and preach to Birds and Beasts.
What Woman is, and help to save them from you.
How Heav'n is in your Eyes, but, in your Hearts
More Hell than Hell has; how your Tongues, like Scorpions,
Both heal and poison; how your Thoughts are woven
With thousand Changes in one subtle Web,
And worn so by you. How that foolish Man
That reads the Story of a Woman's Face,
And dies believing it, is lost forever.
How all the Good you have, is but a Shadow,
I' the Morning with you, and at Night behind you,
Past and forgotten. How your vows are Frosts,
Fast for a Night, and with the next Sun gone.
How you are, being taken altogether,
A mere Confusion, and so dead a Chaos
That Love cannot distinguish."

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

RAYMOND had been looking forward with intense eagerness to this meeting. Infatuated, absorbed with one idea, he had come to call evil good, and good evil. His mind was saturated with Mussetism, with Swinburneism, with Gauthierism, with every ism that makes passion a god, and sacrifice to it the true worship. The order of things was inverted with him: generosity, honor, self-abnegation, seemed weak, puerile qualities, strength was yielding to what he chose to call Fate. That his love would triumph he never for an instant doubted: he put into the scale his youth, his ardor, his personal advantages, and it seemed to him that all Sir Tristram could offer only amounted to the weight of a feather against a pound of gold. There is a very familiar old proverb about reckoning without one's host: it applied with great force in the present instance.

Mignon was utterly devoid of sentiment. Like a cat, she loved things more than people; her own comfort best of all. Now, a woman who leaves her husband for love of another man must needs be a very wicked woman, but she must also have the redeeming qualities, strong affections, and a certain amount of unselfishness; for what woman breathing does not

know that by such a step she wrecks and blasts her whole future and (unless she is utterly bad and callous) is poisoning every drop of the cup of life left her to drink? Mignon loved herself with a love far more perfect and entire than Raymond or any one else could offer her. She had as much idea of sacrificing her future and her position to love as she had of flinging her diamonds out of window, like Queen Guinevere, who, by the way, must have sorely rued that rash act in calmer moments. She liked Raymond: he amused her; it diverted her inexpressibly, too, to torment him and see him writhe under the lash of her pitiless tongue. She regarded him rather as a handsome pendant to herself: his dark, clear-cut beauty set hers off admirably. She liked to see herself reflected in a pier-glass with him, and had said once, jestingly,—

"What a charming couple we make!—quite a study for Faust and Marguerite."

The most moral and severe reader may be quite easy about Mignon: her virtue is as unquestionable as that of any saint in the calendar, if virtue consists in the inability to feel temptation as well as to wage stern and bitter warfare against it.

Raymond's visits became almost of daily recurrence at the Court: indeed, if he misses a day, Mignon is dull, and girds at him on his next appearance. Sir Tristram is miserable. He feels he has acted foolishly and wrongly; he is ashamed of his cowardice, and yet he has not the courage to put a stop to what is becoming so marked a thing as to excite attention. He hates to see them alone; he hates more to seem suspicious, and to thrust his evidently undesired company upon them; he feels tormented by jealousy; and yet he does not believe for an instant that his wife entertains any real feeling for Raymond. He begins to treat the young man with some coldness, at which Mignon, who is not slow to notice his altered manner, redoubles her own kindness.

It might be reassuring to Sir Tristram could he witness the merciless snubs Lady Goldenlocks bestows on her adorer in private. Raymond is prone to be melancholy, Byronic, sentimental; but that is a very difficult rôle to play with a fair one who has not a grain of romance in her composition, but who has unlimited powers of turning the most pathetic, not to say sacred, subjects into ridicule. By sacred I do not, in this instance, mean religious.

Raymond is beginning to lose patience. He will *not* believe that Mignon, in her heart, fails to reciprocate his sentiments; in her levity he only sees a phase of that coquetry which his study of the sex, under the auspices of his favorite authors, has taught him to believe is an unfailing attribute of feminine character.

One day they are sitting together in Mignon's boudoir. Raymond has been fractious and petulant, and Mignon is beginning to be bored by his airs.

"What is the use of my coming here day after day?" he breaks out, throwing back his handsome head and looking a very good study for a fallen angel. "I do not believe you care two straws about me."

"Well, not very much," assents Mignon, placidly. "I cannot make up my mind, though, which bores me the most —to be alone, or to be with you when you are in one of your tempers. I wish Lord Threestars were here! he is never in a temper."

"And you dare say this to me!" cries Raymond, starting up in a fury.

My lady looks at him with a saucy smile and not a shadow of alarm.

"'I dare all that man may do;
He that dares more is———'

something or other, I forget what. I read that in a book last week."

"Do you mean to say," cries Raymond, in a white heat of passion, "that, after you have given me all this encouragement, you prefer Lord Threestars?"

"Encouragement!" laughs Mignon. "What do you mean by encouragement? Is nearly going into convulsions over your ridiculous sentimental airs encouragement? is yawning, till I expect every minute to have lock-jaw, when you spout poetry, encouragement? is telling you I would not have married you if you were Emperor of China and had a million a year, encouragement?"

Raymond stands aghast. At this moment he hates that lovely, laughing face with a bitter hatred: he feels a furious desire to mar its mocking beauty and save himself and all other men in the future the fate of loving it and being heart-broken about it.

"Thank you," he says, icily: "you shall have no more occasion to give me encouragement or the reverse. Believe me, I am perfectly *désillusionné*.

> 'My heart will never ache or break
> For your heart's sake.'"

"I am very glad to hear it," answers Mignon, placidly; then, as he walks with slow and bitter majesty to the door, she runs nimbly and places her back to it. "Don't be a goose!" she says, with eyes brimful of laughter.

"I will endeavor to be one no longer," he answers, in a tragic voice. "Lady Bergholt, will you permit me to pass?"

"I adore a goose," says my lady, mischievously,—"particularly when it is stuffed with onions. That reminds me—on the whole, I prefer you to Lord Threestars: he cannot bear to see a woman eat. I would not marry him for all the world. Fancy your husband objecting to your enjoying your dinner. Why, there isn't a man in the world I would go without my dinner to please."

"What *would* you sacrifice for any man?" asks Raymond, bitterly. "A hair of your golden head? or the pleasure of hurting his feelings? or what?"

"I don't know, I am sure," replies Mignon, reflectively. "Fortunately, I am not put to the test. Sir Tristram makes all the sacrifices, and never expects any from me: that is the sort of husband I like."

Raymond takes both her hands with a fierce gesture.

"Is that true?" he says; "*are* you so contented? do you never feel an unsatisfied longing, a hunger of the heart? do you never realize how empty wealth, title, riches, all are without love?"

"Never," Mignon answers, frankly. "The only hunger I ever feel is bodily. I am very hungry at this moment, and it is past lunch-time. Come, let us go into the dining-room."

"Good-by!" utters Raymond, with gloomy scorn.

"Nonsense!" retorts my lady. "Pâté de foie gras is much more satisfying than a fit of the sulks, and iced sauterne than a ride in the broiling sun. Besides, if you quarrelled with me, you would miss me dreadfully, and be at your wit's end how to get through the day."

"I can put a thousand miles between myself and you," says Raymond, coldly.

"To be sure you can; but distance would only lend enchantment to the view. A thousand miles off, you would think me an angel and yourself a donkey. And it would punish you ten times more than it would me."

"No doubt," sneers Raymond.

"Don't look like that! it does not suit your style of beauty. There is the gong. Come and have lunch."

"No, thank you" (in a freezing tone).

"Think how pleased Sir Tristram would be if you went off in a huff." And Mignon laughs mischievously. So Raymond stays.

The right-minded historian and dramatist always shows how virtue triumphs and vice is punished. In the present instance I shall be pointing a moral and telling the truth when I aver that there was no more miserable man in all the British dominions than Raymond L'Estrange about this period of his existence. As for Mignon, with the exception of being a little bored, she was as happy and free from care as it falls to the lot of most people to be who have an excellent digestion, no heart, and no responsibility.

The week following, the Carlyle family arrived, all except Gerry, who was not to come till the 10th of August. Sir Tristram had a few grouse on his moor, but not enough to make it worth while to invite a party. His own gun and his father- and brother-in-law's would be quite enough. The arrival of his wife's relatives was an immense relief to him: besides the pleasure his kind heart gave him in making them welcome, it was a great satisfaction to him to think that Mignon's *tête-á-tête* with Raymond would be put an end to.

Lady Bergholt received her family with extreme graciousness: it was delightful to her to show herself to them as such an important personage. She took every opportunity of parading her advantages before them with the want of delicacy common to minds not generous: she apparelled herself gorgeously, and decked herself with jewels. But her family, with perhaps the exception of Regina, were quite ready to rejoice in her triumph, to admire, to sympathize, and to exult in her greatness.

Raymond kept away for a few days, chafing furiously the while, and making himself eminently disagreeable to his poor

mother. Mignon, who was getting tired of the companionship of her own people, now she had exhibited all her magnificence to them, wrote and asked him to dinner. Perhaps she wished to show them the only possession they had not seen (in the light of a possession at least). At dinner he made himself extremely agreeable, and was not demonstrative; but when he joined the ladies in the drawing-room, either his discretion had worn off, or the wine he had drunk made him indifferent to any opinions he might provoke. For the first time in her life, Mignon felt a shadow of uneasiness under the glances which his dark eyes flashed upon her.

"Sing us something," she said, at last, in an impatient, imperious tone. "Regina will play for you."

"Will not you?" he murmured, looking languorously down upon her.

"No" (abruptly). "I hate playing accompaniments, and you know I never give you time to get all your expression in" (with a little sneer).

Raymond strolled to the piano, and selected the "Chanson de Fortunio," set to Offenbach's music. I don't know whether the poor, love-lorn lad, when he sang to Jacqueline, kept his eyes from betraying him or belying the words of his song: if he did, Raymond was far from imitating him. When he sang,—

> "Que je l'adore, et qu'elle est blonde
> Comme les blés,"—

he looked steadfastly at Mignon; and when he came to the concluding verse,—

> "Mais j'aime trop pour que je die,
> Qui j'ose aimer,
> Et je veux mourir pour ma mie,
> Sans la nommer,"—

it was sufficiently evident to every one present for whom he was expressing his willingness to die. Each member of the Carlyle family felt horribly embarrassed. As for the father, he would have liked nothing so much as to kick the impudent puppy out of the door. Mrs. Carlyle looked frightened, Mary pained, Regina arched her eyebrows. Sir Tristram alone seemed not to remark anything.

Mignon, whose perceptions in some things were remarkably

quick, observed the effect that was produced on her family, and felt angry with Raymond for putting her in an embarrassing position.

"What a stupid song!" she said, as he finished; "not that I understand half of it, but I conclude, from the way you turned up your eyes, that it was something very sentimental. Can't you sing us a comic song? I like those much better."

"I am sorry I cannot oblige you," answered Raymond, stiffly, turning away to conceal his mortification.

It was a relief to every one when, soon afterwards, he took his departure.

Captain Carlyle meditated long and earnestly that night. Mignon *must* be spoken to, but by whom? Not himself, certainly: he had no intention of exciting the defiance which had only just fallen to slumber. No, he told himself firmly, so delicate a matter came within the province of a mother: let her mother look to it.

He laid his commands upon Mrs. Carlyle. She, poor woman, entreated to be excused, but her lord was firm. The mother, feeling how hopeless was the task, drew her eldest daughter into her counsels. Mary loved Mignon: she had, besides, an immense regard for Sir Tristram, but stronger than every other feeling was her sense of duty. The task was a painful one; but she thought over it, prayed over it, and gathered up all her courage. It seems odd that a girl of eighteen, with a face as fair as an angel's and as candid as a child's, could inspire as much awe of contradicting her as Mignon; but perhaps the reader may know of some parallel case that may help to make it more intelligible to him.

It was the morning but one after Raymond had dined, and Mary followed her sister to her boudoir.

"My dear," she said, in her kind, grave voice, kissing the peach-like cheek, "do you know I think you are a very fortunate girl?"

"Yes?" (with a little gesture of indifference.) "Well, I suppose I am."

"You have everything heart can desire."

Mignon looked as though, if it were not too much trouble, she would dissent from so broad a proposition.

"The kindest husband in the world."

Mignon conjectured dimly what was coming.

"Yes," she said, turning to look at Mary, and speaking half in jest, half in earnest; "but the thing I am most thankful of all for is that I am *my own mistress*" (with great decision), "and that *no one* has any right to interfere with me or to lecture me."

"Not those who love you with all their hearts?" whispered Mary, in a low voice, looking tenderly in Mignon's clear blue eyes. "Have those who have your welfare most at heart no right to say a word of warning if they think that in your innocence and inexperience you stand in need of it?"

"What do you mean?" asked Mignon, irritably.

"I mean," replied Mary, quickly, "that I think it is painful to Sir Tristram to see Mr. L'Estrange treat you in the manner he does, although he is too delicate and generous even to seem to notice it."

"Did he ask you to tell me this?" cried Mignon, with a rebellious flush.

"My dear, I think you must know him too well to imagine that what he is too delicate to say to you he would be likely to mention to others."

"Then *I* think," said Mignon, firing up, "it would be well if other people imitated his delicacy and allowed me to manage my own affairs."

"Mignon!" cried Mary, imploringly.

But my lady is quite incapable of brooking interference: she has been accustomed to find her word law and her sovereign will undisputed so long that a word of reproof or admonition is an unpardonable impertinence in her eyes. As ill fortune would have it, who should appear in the doorway at this very moment but Raymond!

"Talk of the devil and you see his horns!" cried Mignon, with a laugh. "You are not so much like him, though, this morning as you are sometimes: you look quite good-tempered."

Two little red spots of anger are still burning on her cheeks: she feels in that reckless mood which sometimes seems to indicate high spirits in young people. To those who understand them, however, it is a mood that generally lies nearer tears than laughter: it is an angry disturbance of their pride and mightiness, and a secret consciousness of being in the wrong.

Those are the moods in which the young love to shock and surprise their grave elders; and if the elders remembered some

such feeling of their own youth, and were sympathetic and tender instead of being cold and reproving, the masterful young ones would soon come down off their pinnacle of folly.

"What do you think?" continued Mignon, all in a breath: "my sister was just saying how handsome you were, and that she almost wondered I did not fall in love with and run away with you."

Raymond, looking from one to the other, conjectured that Miss Carlyle had been saying something of a very different nature.

"I must tell you," proceeded Mignon, still laughing, and speaking in a loud key, "that Mary adores Sir Tristram: they would have made a nice, respectable old couple, would they not?"

"I think they would have suited each other admirably," answered Raymond.

Mary looked up at him with some displeasure, and observed, with gentle dignity,—

"Do you not think that there are some subjects on which it is better taste not to jest?"

But Raymond was as difficult to abash as even Mignon.

"Lady Bergholt asked me a question, and I believe politeness, not to say good taste, required me to answer it. I agree with her that you and Sir Tristram would have made an admirable pair, even more suitable, if she will permit me to say so" (with an ill-concealed sneer), "than Sir Tristram and herself."

Mary felt exceedingly indignant: she would have liked to get up and go out of the room, but thought it wrong to leave him alone with Mignon.

But my lady took the law into her own hands.

"Come, Raymond," she said, gayly, "let us go into the garden."

This was the first time she had ever called him by his name. It was a continuation of her "high spirits." When the door was closed upon them, he took her hand eagerly.

"I am in love with my name when I hear it from your sweet lips," he whispered.

"Bah!" she said, snatching it from him; "I only said it to vex Mary. And I don't think it the least pretty: it is as stupid and romantic as my own."

Raymond, being so smartly snubbed, did not find his tongue again until they were out in the garden.

"Your sister seems a fine specimen of the genus old maid," he remarked, feeling a grudge against poor Mary for trying to do her duty.

"My sister is an angel," retorted Mignon, fiercely, "and you are not fit to wipe the dust off her shoes."

Here was the beginning of a very pretty quarrel; but at this juncture Mignon observed her father coming rapidly towards them, and the demon of mischief returned upon her fourfold.

"He is coming to spoil sport. Quick! quick!" she cried, and, before Raymond knew what she was about, Mignon caught him by the arm, dragged him down the steep green slope of the terrace, and flew like a young deer across the lawn and towards the wood, Raymond following with an irritable sense of impaired dignity.

Captain Carlyle, surveying the flying pair, who would have made a charming study for Atalanta and Hippomenes, launched after them a most unpaternal anathema, and retired to the house to pour out the vials of his wrath upon his unhappy wife.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"Did you ever hear my definition of marriage? It is, that it resembles a pair of shears, so joined that they cannot be separated, often moving in opposite directions, yet always punishing any one who comes between them."

SYDNEY SMITH.

THE Carlyle family were very uneasy indeed. Sir Tristram continued to give no sign, and Mr. L'Estrange made Bergholt Court his home as it pleased him. It was not that Mignon's father, mother, or sisters thought she was in danger of losing her heart: truth to tell, they had very limited faith in that portion of her anatomy; but they saw that she was by way of compromising her dignity and making herself the subject of remark, and this, they were well aware, would endanger her

position in the county. They held solemn conclaves on the subject: each wished to delegate to the other the unpleasant task of remonstrating with the perverse beauty. Mary felt no courage to resume the subject, after the manner in which Mignon had flouted her remarks before.

"Wait till Gerry comes," advised Regina: "he is the only one of us who dares to speak to her. She will listen to anything from him."

"Wait!" grumbled Captain Carlyle; "wait until the silly girl's name is in every mouth, and people are beginning to look coldly upon her."

"Well, then, papa," retorted Regina, "why do not you speak to her?"

Captain Carlyle was silent. He was dreadfully afraid of offending his youngest daughter. He liked his quarters at Bergholt; he liked the prospect of all the shooting he was to get there; and he knew perfectly that if he made himself obnoxious to Mignon this would be his first and last visit. So he elected to take Regina's advice and wait for Gerry.

Now, if there was one human being whom Lady Bergholt loved with any approximation to the devotion she felt for herself, it was her twin brother. She loved him even more since she chose to consider that she had made such a gigantic sacrifice for him. She could think and talk of nothing else for days before he came: his very name was a weariness to Raymond's flesh: he grew sulky under Mignon's continued rhapsodies, which, as she observed they were unwelcome to her auditor, my lady kindly continued to reiterate with unwearied fervor.

"You must not come near for days," she tells him, kindly. "I shall be so wrapped up in Gerry, I shall not have a word to say to you."

"Oh, Gemini!" says Raymond, with a little scornful laugh.

"That is meant for a joke, I suppose," remarks Mignon, disdainfully. "I never made a joke in my life: it is only very stupid people who do, I think."

Raymond contemplates her with a little bitter working of the mouth. She is sitting on a low, cushioned, garden chair, under a broad-leaved chestnut. The faint pale blue of her dress with its clouds of lace sets off the exquisite fairness of her skin; her eyes are like deep wells in which the sky is reflected

on a summer night; the fine threads of her hair sparkle like gold. The same thought that came to poor Oswald Carey comes to Raymond as he looks at her.

He speaks. Though his words are sweet, the tone of them is low and bitter. His dark, close curls are pressed back against the tree-trunk, his hazel eyes are bent upon her face in a hard unfaltering gaze.

"You are the most beautiful woman I ever saw. I doubt if Helen of Troy were fairer. Everything about you (outwardly) is perfect: there is not one feature in your face that sculptor or painter could improve. You are altogether lovely."

He pauses, and she looks at him with mocking wonder in her eyes.

"You are very kind," she says: "but you remind me of that piece at the Haymarket—The Palace of Truth, I think—where people said something quite different from what they meant to say. To judge by your face, I could imagine that, instead of all the pretty things you have treated me to, you were saying something very spiteful."

"I have not finished," he answers, not relaxing either the steadfastness or the bitterness of his gaze.

"Oh!" laughs Mignon; "I have had the jam, and the powder is coming. Is that it?"

Raymond resumes.

"I dare say men would commit crimes and follies for you, as they did for the lovely women in the olden time. I dare say, if circumstances had placed you in a similar position, you would have had the bliss of embroiling kingdoms and causing rivers of blood to flow. As it is, your powers for evil are necessarily circumscribed, though doubtless you will do a good deal of mischief before you die. But——" And he pauses.

"Now comes the tug of war!" mocks Mignon.

"But—suppose you were stricken down with smallpox to-morrow, suppose you were disfigured in a railway accident, suppose, from whatever cause, you lost your beauty, I do not believe you would have a friend in the world, nor a creature who cared for you."

Mignon's eyes flash with indignant amazement; but Raymond has not finished.

"What have you ever done to win any one's love? when have you been unselfish, or tender, or pitiful? when have you

done one of those kind actions that make other women friends, even though they have no beauty? when have you considered any breathing human being but yourself?"

It certainly is rather "a strong order" for so very egotistical a young gentleman as Raymond to give a lecture upon the very faults he possesses himself; but, as it has been remarked, our own failings are always those which offend us most in others.

"Thank you!" cries Mignon, with blazing eyes, and cheeks stirred to carnation by her wrath. "I shall know in future how to value all your protestations of love and admiration. Not that I ever thought them sincere, or worth having if they were."

"But you see," returns Raymond, his bitterness relaxing now he has given vent to his spleen, "you have not taken the smallpox nor been smashed in a railway-carriage: so the fact of your beauty remains, and consequently the fact that I, and other fools like me, will break our hearts about you."

"*Break* YOUR *heart!*" retorts Mignon, with a whole volume of scorn in her voice.

So it will appear that this young couple, who are giving so much anxiety to their elders, have not that exalted respect and esteem for each other upon which it is said, and truly said, the tender passion should be founded.

After having indulged himself in telling these bitter truths to my lady, Raymond has to eat a fabulous amount of humble pie before he is restored to anything like favor. Strange to say, his words rankle in Mignon's breast. As a rule, reproaches and sharp words glance off her as arrows from an iron target; but when, later, she goes to her room to dress, she looks at herself earnestly in the glass, and says, in her heart, "It is quite true. If I were ugly, who would care for me?" And she sighs, and for once wishes she were something worthier and better. Gerry is to arrive to-night: she runs a dozen times to his room, to think if she can invent any improvement; she puts on one of her loveliest dresses, though she will have to change it again in half an hour for dinner; and when she sees the dog-cart coming up the drive, she flies down-stairs and out upon the steps, and, almost before he alights, both her arms are around his neck, and she is giving him such a hug as no one in the memory of man ever beheld her give. The

servants, who have never seen her caress man, woman, child, dog, or horse, are fairly astounded. A bitter pang goes through Sir Tristram's heart; but he comes forward and shakes the lad heartily by the hand, and welcomes him as though he were his own brother. As for Gerry, he is not like his sister: perhaps the warmest corner in his heart is for her, but he has plenty of love and kindness and good will for every one else.

He gives lavish greetings all round, whilst my lady looks on with ill-concealed impatience. It is a real pleasure to see his bright, cheery smile, that looks like the incarnation of a sunbeam, to hear his fresh young voice: it makes even the servants, who are as immovable as becomes their position in a "high" family, relax the muscles of their face: it is easy to prognosticate that before three days there won't be one among them who will not be a willing slave to him.

"If my lady was only like him," said the butler (and no doubt many wholesome truths are uttered in the servants' hall), "we should all fall down and worship her."

My lady, however, gives them no cause to break the second commandment: not one of them likes her in his heart, although her loveliness has much the same fascination for them that it has for their superiors.

Gerry's gratitude towards Sir Tristram is unbounded: he seems as if he cannot show it enough. The affectionate deference with which he treats him charms every one except Mignon, who seems to consider that all his gratitude is due to her. Gerry has been gazetted to the —th Lancers, and is to join in a month. Sir Tristram got him his commission, Sir Tristram has paid every shilling of his expenses since last September, Sir Tristram has given him his outfit, and makes him the liberal allowance that permits him to live like a young gentleman of the period, and Gerry has the most lively recollection of all these favors. The bounty he has received does not make him, like the horse-leech's daughters, cry, "Give! give!" he would not ask anything more of his brother-in-law for the world: to save his life, he would not exceed his allowance.

There is only just time after he arrives to dress for dinner, but imperious Mignon is not to be contradicted in her desire to have her brother all to herself. Almost immediately dinner is over, she gets up and signs to Gerry to accompany her.

He looks first at his brother-in-law,—which makes my lady toss her head scornfully.

"Will you excuse me, Sir Tristram?" he asks.

"By all means, my boy," answers Sir Tristram, heartily.

Now, Madam Mignon, with the curiosity which belongs only to the inferior sex, is dying to see Gerry's finery, which she has especially commanded him to bring.

"Come," she cries, linking her arm in his, and marching him off up-stairs; "I want to see all your lovely clothes." And Gerry, who is quite as proud of his uniform as any other young embryo soldier, nothing loath, obeys her behest.

But when they have arrived at his room, the first thing he does is to put his arms round his sister and smother her with kisses.

"Oh, Yonnie! what a darling you look! and how can I ever thank you and Sir Tristram enough! Are you quite happy?"

Mignon at this moment is possessed by a perfect sense of *bien-être;* but she has no idea of undervaluing the sacrifice she wishes Gerry to consider she has made: so she heaves a little sigh, which is exceedingly strained and unnatural, and answers,—

"As happy as I can expect to be."

"But he is such a thundering good fellow," utters Gerry, wistfully.

"Yes, but you didn't have to marry him; you haven't got to live with him for the next hundred years," says Mignon. "There!" (impatiently), "I don't want to talk about *him.* Get your things out."

So Gerry, with much pride and care, unfolds his treasures one by one from their wrappings, and exhibits them to Mignon's dazzled eyes.

"You must put them on! I *must* see you in them!" cries Mignon. "Stay!" (as a sudden idea rushes through her brain); and she claps her hands and dances round the room in wild delight. "I know. I will put on your full-dress uniform, and you shall put on the undress, and we will go down-stairs together. You stoop a little, and I will make myself tall, and they won't know which is which."

"Will it be quite the thing, Yonnie?" asks Gerry, with some hesitation.

"Of course it will. Why not? Quick! give me all the things, and I will carry them to my room."

The maid is summoned; but it is as much as her place is worth to venture any remonstrance. In twenty minutes my lady is as dashing a cornet as ever held her Majesty's commission, and swaggers about as only a woman in men's clothes can. Gerry is dressed long ago, and comes to give the finishing-touch. He is not quite easy in his mind about the propriety of the escapade, but Mignon is wild with spirits. As they go out arm in arm, their swords clanking behind them, the corridor rings again with her laughter. The party have left the dining-room; neither are they in the drawing-room.

"We shall find them in the garden," says Mignon.

They saunter through the open windows. It is bright moonlight. The night is intensely hot, and coffee is being served out of doors. They run full tilt against the butler and footman, who, for once in their lives, so far forget themselves as to look something of the astonishment they feel. Immediately afterwards they join the group. In one instant it is evident to Gerry that the joke is not appreciated: there is a look of dismay on every face. Sir Tristram colors and rises.

"My dear," he says, advancing hurriedly to Mignon, "pray return to the house before the servants see you."

He has been educated in the good old school. For a woman to lower herself in the eyes of her household is a very shocking offense, in his opinion.

"Too late!" cries Mignon, with a laugh, half defiant, half awkward. "I just ran into Howell's arms and nearly made him drop the coffee-pot."

"Mignon," whispers Mary, "do come in, dear." And she takes her by the arm.

"How stupid you all are!" cries Mignon, with an angry flush in her fair face: "to make such a fuss about a joke!"

For the first time in his life, her husband speaks angrily to her.

"It is no joke for a lady to degrade herself before her servants, Lady Bergholt."

Mignon turns upon him furiously.

"Whose fault is it that I am *Lady Bergholt?*" she cries, with an accent of bitter contempt on the name and title; but here Gerry drags her away by main force, and she returns to

her room and gives vent to a passion of angry tears. She does not appear again that evening, and poor Gerry feels rather sad and crestfallen.

Next morning, however, the escapade seems to be forgotten by all but Mignon, who treats every one but Gerry with extreme coldness and hauteur. Captain Carlyle loses no time in imparting to Gerry his uneasiness about Raymond's attentions, and the poor lad feels more seriously afflicted than he has ever done in his life, except when his uncle died. Suppose Mignon had married Sir Tristram for his sake; suppose she found herself unable to love him, and had conceived an attachment for L'Estrange! These thoughts sadly spoiled his first day's shooting. But he had resolved what to do. *He* speak to his sister! *he* upbraid her! *he* even have a disloyal doubt of her, when she has been his guardian angel! No! His affair was with the man, not with her. And, in his chivalrous boyish heart, he was ready to fight for her honor to the death.

Raymond dined at Bergholt on the evening of the 12th: he had ridden over in the afternoon.

"I thought your paragon would be out," he says, "and you might be feeling dull."

"I am rather," assents my lady.

"Well, are you getting at all bored by his military conversation? I suppose he is pretty full of swagger——"

"As for swagger," retorts Mignon, with a malicious laugh, "you have quite accustomed me to that. And I don't believe he has swaggered as much in eight-and-forty hours as you do in ten minutes."

Raymond is pleased to be immensely gracious to Gerry, and Gerry, who meant to treat him with much coolness, is not proof against the frank kindness of his manner. On this particular evening there is nothing very marked in his attentions to Mignon, and Gerry begins to think his father has made some mistake. A few days, however, suffice to convince him that there is but too much truth in what he has heard: it is evident that Mignon, although she snubs Raymond most unmercifully, takes a certain amount of pleasure in his society, and likes him to come to the house, and it is not only evident, but unmistakable, that Raymond is very much in love indeed. So Gerry buckles on his moral harness and prepares to do battle for his sister's good name.

More than once Raymond has pressed him to go over to L'Estrange Hall, and on the sixth day after his arrival at Bergholt he accepts the invitation.

"I will ride over to-morrow, if it suits you," he says; and Raymond gives a pleased assent. He likes Gerry because he resembles Mignon; he likes him for his own sake too, and he is more than anxious to be friendly with him. The boy's heart is heavy within him as he rides along the green lanes and across the common. He has never exchanged hard words with any one in his life; personally, he likes and admires Raymond, and would gladly be his friend. But he has a strong sense of honor, an almost chivalrous feeling of his obligations to Sir Tristram, and, above all things, an intense devotion to his twin sister. And so, without a word or hint to any one, he rides forth with a heavy heart to do what duty bids him.

Raymond, than whom no man living can be more gracious or winning when the mood is on him, comes out with the most cordial of greetings, treats him as though he were a brother returned after a long absence, introduces him to his mother, and unfolds his projects for the day's amusement. Poor Gerry is ill at ease, miserable: he has no intention of staying: how should he eat bread and salt with the man who may one day stand face to face with him as his bitterest foe? There is a nervous flutter at his heart: his color comes and goes; he answers at random; but Raymond is so full of spirits, and has so much to say, he does not seem to remark Gerry's strangeness. They go round the stables, look at the dogs, pay a visit to the keepers' cottages to see the young pheasants that are being brought up there, and finally return to the house. And yet Gerry has not spoken.

"It must be lunch-time," says Raymond, looking at his watch.

And then Gerry, trembling in every limb from strong excitement, his heart in his throat, begins,—

"I cannot stay to lunch, thanks. I came here to say something to you: when I have said it, I will go."

Raymond looks at him in unfeigned astonishment, but quick as lightning comes the intuition of what that something is. He says nothing, but looks Gerry full in the face with his dark resolute eyes, and waits.

The words that Gerry has arranged in his head take flight,

or come out headlong, pell-mell, trembling, fluttering, but he makes himself understood.

"You have been very kind to me: I like you very much, I wish we could be friends, but my sister is more than anything else to me in the world. I don't blame you,—of course you can't help it,—I don't know who could,—but it *must not be.*"

"My dear fellow," responds Raymond, coolly, "if you would kindly try and be a little more lucid, I might get some idea of what you are driving at."

"I think you know," says the boy, a flush overspreading the face that is so like Mignon's. "I mean that you are in love with my sister, and that no one can help seeing it. And —and people will talk about it, and that will be bad for her."

"Don't you think," remarks Raymond, with the shadow of a sneer, "that her husband is the best judge of that? Don't you think he is old enough to take care of her honor?"

"He is the noblest fellow in the world," breaks out Gerry: "he is so good himself that he would not even suspect others of abusing his generosity."

"But, my dear fellow," says Raymond, assuming a genial and ingenuous air, "what do you complain of? What do you want me to do? Surely it is natural that I should admire so very lovely a woman as Lady Bergholt?" He wants to divert Gerry's suspicions, and to treat the matter in such a way as will make it difficult for him to proceed to extremities. In his heart he laughs at the idea of a boy like this standing between him and what has come to be the one object of his life.

"I want you to keep away from her," answers Gerry, in a low voice. "If you *really* care for her, you will want to do what is best for her."

Raymond looks at him, a faint smile curving his lips.

"Have you ever been in love?"

Gerry blushes.

"Well, no, perhaps not exactly in love," he says, hesitating, "but I have been very fond of one or two girls."

"You have never felt a passion that has absorbed your whole heart and thoughts, never cared so much for any one that every hour spent away from them was positive pain and misery?"

Raymond's voice is hoarse and deep: his eyes flash: he is in bitter earnest.

"No," answers Gerry, as if he was a little ashamed of not having experienced the sensations described.

"Then pardon me for saying you can be no judge in the matter. Your sister was *sold*" (Gerry winces) "to a man as old as her father, when she was such a child as not to know what love meant: is it wonderful that when my heart speaks to her's, her's should answer? Let those who sold her look to it!"

There is a dark red flush on Raymond's face: he forgets that he is speaking to Mignon's brother, and that he is only a lad. In his tone there is a covert threat, and Gerry resents it.

"She is not in love with you," he says, stoutly; "no more in love with you than she was with Oswald Carey."

"Pray who is Oswald Carey?" asks Raymond, sharply.

"Oh, a great friend of mine: he worshipped the ground she walked on, and when she gave him up for Sir Tristram it broke his heart, and he went off to India."

"Oh!" says Raymond, drawing a long breath. "And may I ask on what grounds you have come to the conclusion that your sister is as indifferent to me as she was to Mr. Oswald Carey?"

"Because she laughs and gibes at you all day long," answers Gerry, with imprudent frankness; "and she makes fun of you behind your back. She would not do that if she cared for you."

Raymond is stung to the quick.

"Does Lady Bergholt know of your errand here to-day?" he asks, after a moment's pause.

"No. I would not have her know for the world."

"Perhaps Sir Tristram does?"

"No one knows," cries Gerry, indignantly. "And now give me your answer and let me go. Will you give up coming so often to see my sister and paying her attentions which may compromise her?"

Raymond draws himself up to his full height, and looks down at the stripling as Goliath might have looked at David.

"I will *not* give up going to see your sister," he answers, contemptuously; "nor will I give up showing all the admiration and devotion I feel for her."

The red color mounts to Gerry's neck and brow, his blue

eyes flash as Mignon's are wont to do, his nostrils quiver, he looks as gallant a lad as you could well find in the three kingdoms.

"Then," he says, in a voice trembling with righteous wrath, "*I* will compel you. You think me a boy: you shall find I am a man. I suppose you are a gentleman: you will hardly refuse to fight. If disgrace comes to my sister through you, it will not be until you have my blood on your hands, not till I am dead, and can no longer defend her."

Raymond is at a loss. He feels the absurdity of the situation, but he cannot help admiring the lad's chivalrous bearing. To quarrel *à l'outrance* with a boy of eighteen is out of the question, but he sees in him a determined and unpleasant obstacle.

"He will be gone in another fortnight," he says to himself. "It is a confounded nuisance; but I suppose I must do something to lull his suspicions."

He holds out his hand with a smile.

"My dear fellow, I would not hurt a hair of your head. Keep your sword for the enemies of your country. I hope you will never have occasion to draw it on me."

But Gerry declines the proffered hand.

"I will not take it until you swear to desist from persecuting my sister."

"Persecuting—nonsense!" cries Raymond, with a light laugh. "Come, now you have had your heroics, get off the stilts and come and have some lunch."

"Will you be so good as to order my horse?" says Gerry. "I will not stay any longer."

"Certainly, if you wish it," replies Raymond, coldly, ringing the bell. He is getting a little bored. "Have Mr. Carlyle's horse brought round," he says: and during the time that elapses until it is announced, not a word is spoken between them.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"L'abbé Bouchitté, quand on faisait devant lui avec enthousiasme l'éloge de la beauté d'une femme, vous interrompait en disant,
"'Mange-t-elle?'
"'Plaît-il? Que dites-vous?'
"'Je vous demande si elle mange.'
"'Je ne sais pas encore, mais je crois que oui.'
"'Pouah! alors.'
"'Pourquoi pouah?'
"'Parce que je n'admets pas une femme qui mange!'"

THE following morning, Mignon receives a letter:

"DEAR LADY BERGHOLT,

"Your fire-eating brother gave me such a terrible fright yesterday that I shall not feel safe as long as we are both in the same county. So I am having my things packed, that I may make my escape whilst there is yet time. I have deferred going to Scotland, because I found greater charms here; but, now that the only house where I care to be is closed against me, I shall go and have a turn at the grouse. You will, I dare say, be able to console yourself for my absence by *making fun of me behind my back.*

"Ever yours,

"RAYMOND L'ESTRANGE."

Mignon reads the letter in silence, and puts it in her pocket. When breakfast is over she says to her brother,—

"Gerry, I want you to come into the wood with me this morning."

Gerry feels guilty, but he says to himself,—

"He surely can't have been such a sneak as to tell her."

As they walk along together, Mignon is full of spirits; she laughs and talks about a thousand things; and Gerry tries to persuade himself that it is only his conscience that makes him uneasy. Presently they come to a felled tree, and Mignon sits down upon it.

"Now," she says, abruptly, fixing her eyes on his face, "what have you been saying to Mr. L'Estrange?"

Gerry blushes like a girl, and drops his eyes. Mignon takes the letter from her pocket, and hands it to him.

"What a coward!" says the boy, bitterly, as he reads it.

"Well," says Mignon, "I want to know what you said to him."

"I cannot tell you," Gerry answers, turning his head away.

Dangerous fires begin to kindle in the dark-blue eyes; there is an ominous dilating of the fine nostrils; a tempest begins to heave under the lace that covers my lady's breast.

"How dare you interfere with me? how dare you insult my friends?" she cries.

"Yonnie, don't be angry with me!" he pleads. "I never meant you to know."

"Of course not" (bitterly); "but, you see, you did not manage quite cleverly." (Then, in a tone of disgust,) "I never thought you were a sneak before. So this is your gratitude!"

"Yes!" he cries, stung to the quick: "this *is* my gratitude. I would rather kill any one, or let any one kill me, than that it should be in people's power to say a word against you."

Mignon's anger subsides into mirth.

"Good heavens!" she says, laughing, "you don't mean to say you have been challenging him?"

Gerry is silent.

"Did you?" she repeats.

"I told him," he answers, in a low voice, "that he *must* cease paying you the marked attention he is doing, or——"

"Or what?"

"There is only one alternative between gentlemen," answers Gerry, with dignity, "when one says, 'You must,' and the other says, 'I will not.'"

"Oh! and so he said he would not?" asks Mignon, curiously.

"He gave me to understand as much."

"Yes," utters Mignon, complacently; "I don't think any one would get much by saying *must* to Raymond."

Gerry fixes his eyes full upon her. He looks as though he were trying to read her through, trying not to find something he is afraid of.

"You do not care for him?" he whispers, with a voice in which doubt and fear struggle painfully.

"I *do* care for him very much," she says, wilfully.

He throws himself down at her feet, with his arms across her knees, and his eyes fixed imploringly on hers.

"Oh, Yonnie!" he cries, with intense earnestness, "for God's sake, don't say that! You don't know what it means! you don't know what an awful thing it is for a married woman to care for another man! Oh, God!" and he clasps her so tight, it pains her, "if I thought you would be what—what some women are, I should ask him to kill you first."

His voice quivers with passion, his eyes devour her face for an answer, his boyish soul is shaken with fear at what her careless words have implied.

Mignon feels a little abashed.

"Don't be a goose," she says, pushing him from her. "I like the man: I don't love him, if that is what you mean."

"Oh, Yonnie, are you sure?"

"Of course I am" (impatiently). "What should I see to love in a man who is wrapped up in himself, and has the worst temper in the world? What has put all these ridiculous ideas into your head?"

"I beg your pardon, darling, for having doubted you an instant," says poor Gerry, penitently, "but no one can help seeing that he is in love with you, and from something he said I—I was afraid——"

"Oho!" laughs Mignon. "What did he say? He is conceited enough to fancy I am dying of love for him. What did he say?"

"He said" (hesitatingly), "it was only natural that, when his heart spoke to yours, yours should answer."

Mignon bursts into such immoderate laughter that her brother cannot fail to be reassured.

"I wonder what his heart said, and what mine answered," she cries, between two peals of laughter. "I must ask him."

"Yonnie! you would not surely do such a thing!"

"Well, no; it would hardly be safe. I should tease the life out of him, and raise his homicidal propensities. I don't want my own blood shed, nor any one else's on my account. And so" (still laughing) "he had the impudence to tell you I was in love with him. Pray, did he favor you with any further confidences?"

"Yonnie, darling," says the lad, gravely, "this is not a

subject for jesting. It may amuse you, but you don't know what pain it is giving to others."

"Fable of the boys and the frog," laughs Mignon. "The boy and the frogs it ought to be. I am glad I am the boy."

"If you let him think you care at all for him," proceeds Gerry, with increased gravity, "you foster his feelings and make him suffer all the more. And oh, Yonnie! I don't think you have any idea what pain it gives Sir Tristram. I watch him sometimes, and, though he seems not to notice anything, I know he suffers agonies. I wonder you don't see how worn and hunted his eyes look at times, how his hand trembles when he takes up a book and pretends to read, how he does not seem always to hear when people speak to him."

"He is getting old and deaf," scoffs Mignon.

"Don't talk like that, dear. I think it is only your way. I can't believe that you are really indifferent to other people's sufferings."

"Why *should* people suffer?" cries Mignon, indignantly. "No one could make me. I shouldn't care the least if Sir Tristram preferred some one else's company to mine. I wish he would."

This is not strictly true, for my lady has been extremely put out more than once by her husband seeming to take pleasure in Mrs. Stratheden's society. Her dislike for Olga has gone on increasing steadily. They constantly meet at different houses in the county, and, as Mignon puts herself out of the way to be uncivil, Olga keeps aloof from her. For Sir Tristram's sake, whom she likes most heartily, she is anxious to avoid any open breach. Mignon was furious with Gerry only the other day for having spoken enthusiastically of Mrs. Stratheden, whom he had talked to at a garden party.

"I don't think you *would* like it," says Gerry, replying to his sister's remark. "No one does. And if it would hurt you, who do not care very much about him, what do you think it must do to him, who worships the ground you walk on, when he sees you whispering and laughing with L'Estrange?"

"I am sure he is very welcome to hear all our whisperings," retorts Mignon; "if he did, Ifidon't think he would feel very jealous. However, thanks to you, his rival is gone, and, for the matter of that, I don't care if I never see him again."

"Yonnie, darling," whispers Gerry, looking with pleading eyes in her face, "I want you to promise me something."

"Well?"

"Promise me, when he comes back, not to let him be here so often, not to seem to give him encouragement."

"I shan't promise anything of the sort," answers Mignon, knitting her fair brows. "I am not going to be moped to death to please anybody. But if you think I am such an idiot as to be capable of giving up all I now have" (with a wave of her hand) "for the sake of Mr. Raymond L'Estrange, I can only regret your singular want of insight into character."

As it happens, Mignon does not miss Raymond in the least. Kitty is at Elmor, where she has a gay party; Mrs. Strathedeen gives a series of charming entertainments at The Manor House, which Mignon's dislike of the hostess does not prevent her taking part in; there are parties at Bergholt; and, indeed, every one combines to make the autumn a gay and pleasant one.

Raymond, in Scotland, is chafing furiously at his enforced absence. The only consolation he has is derived from the conviction that Mignon is suffering some part of his pain. If he could only see her! Gerry has left to join his regiment; Mrs. Carlyle and her daughters have returned to Rose Cottage; and, of the family, only Captain Carlyle remains at the Court, for partridge-shooting.

There is to be a large party in the house, and Mignon is looking forward with mingled nervousness and pleasure to the idea of playing hostess. She has very little trouble: Sir Tristram arranges everything for her. Since Raymond's departure, he has grown young and cheerful again, almost happy; for Mignon, slightly influenced by her brother's remonstrance, treats him with a shade more consideration.

Lord Threestars is to be one of the guests,—a circumstance that gives unmitigated satisfaction to the lady of Bergholt. She is bent upon his conquest: he is a victim worthy her bow and spear, and poor Raymond vanishes from her fickle mind as stars wane when the sun rises. Poor Raymond, indeed! bad, wicked, unprincipled Raymond, who is going to be punished as he deserves.

Mignon fears no rival. True, there will be one or two good-looking women of the party, but my lady has superb confidence

in her own charms. She does not know yet that there is something which can triumph over mere beauty,—particularly when people are thrown together as they are in the country. Ah! there is more mischief done in three days in a country house than in a whole London season. And do not the fair know it, and lay themselves out accordingly?

Lord Threestars, who is a good deal courted and has a host of invitations, has decided upon accepting this one in remembrance of Lady Bergholt's loveliness, and not at all ignorant of the contingent possibility of being made a victim of. He is a thorough man of the world, a good shot, a good rider, cleverer and better read than most men who live the purposeless life of a man of fashion, but it pleases him to assume a languor and a semblance of effeminacy: his best friend does not know why. Perhaps he heard in his youth the story of the fragile-looking exquisite whom, by way of a joke, a brawny scavenger splashed with mud as he passed. "Dirty fellah!" murmured the languid one, and, turning, picked the fellow up as if he had been a baby and flung him into his own mud-cart. At all events, that was his style, and men who had chanced to tackle my lord, relying on his delicate, indifferent appearance, had more than once come off second best.

Lord Threestars, as he dresses for dinner on the evening of his arrival at the Court, is devoutly hoping that the duty of taking his hostess in to dinner will not devolve upon him.

"She is looking lovely," he reflects, "perfectly, exquisitely lovely. I feel myself *en train* for a new emotion. If I sit next her at dinner and she eats much or not delicately, I am lost. My dear G——, how right you are never to pronounce upon a woman until you have seen her eat!"

This particular hobby about women eating is hereditary in Lord Threestars' family, and a source of great heart-burning to the lady portion of it. His father interdicts cheese and sherry for the female members of the family: if he had detected the faintest aroma of onion about them, dire would have been their disgrace. It was therefore the habit of these fair daughters of Eve, with the wilfulness our first mother transmitted to us, as soon as their father was absent for a day or two, to cause their maids to bring hunches of bread and cheese and *raw onions* to their bedrooms. One day, after one of these orgies, my lord returned suddenly and unexpectedly. He was an affectionate

father, and it was the habit of his daughters to greet his return with filial osculations. Oh, agony! despair! What was to be done! My lord had returned and was asking for my ladies, announced the affrighted Abigail. What could they do? They put their pretty mouths together and breathe into each other's faces. "Oh, Ethel! *do* I smell of onions? Oh, Maud! *do* I? Oh, Gwen! *do* I? But, alas! all alike are guilty, and cannot therefore pronounce any reliable opinion.

My lord's voice is heard shouting in the distance.

"Stay!" cries Ethel, who has the genius of the family, and she rushes to the chimney-piece: "here is a cigarette I stole from Frank's case. *Let us all smoke!* He will be very angry, but it will be nothing to the onions."

Each takes two or three whiffs, and chokes and splutters. My lord's voice comes nearer, louder, more impatient. Ethel flings the cigarette into the grate, and, rushing to the door, opens it and leads the van of culprits.

"What the devil are you all about? Where does the tobacco come from? Have you got a man hiding up there?"

"Oh, papa," pleads Ethel, demurely, whilst the two other pretty little faces look very white and scared, "we have been very naughty, and you will be dreadfully angry with us, but we got a cigarette, and we have been trying to smoke. Oh, please, papa, we will never do it again!"

"Just let me catch you, you abandoned monkeys," cries my lord, half angry, half amused, "and I'll get a birch rod and whip you all round. I only hope you'll all be very sick. Don't come near me! I won't kiss one of you for a week!"

And, as their father retreats down the corridor, the three wicked little minxes bury their heads in the pillows and give vent to stifled peals of laughter.

When Lord Blank proposed to Lady Ethel last year, she made her acceptance conditional upon being permitted to eat onions. Strange to say, since she has been allowed to exercise her own judgment in the matter her taste for that ambrosia has vanished, and one evening recently, when her husband kissed her after dinner, she said, with a charming little *moue*,—

"Really, darling, I thing onions have rather a horrid smell!"

Lady Bergholt has had nothing to do with the arrangement of the guests at dinner. She has only stipulated for one thing:

that is, that as Lord Threestars cannot take her in to dinner, because Lord Blankshire, a greater luminary, is dining, he shall at least sit on her left hand. What, therefore, is her sovereign displeasure on finding, as they take their seats, that Mrs. Stratheden, who is the guest of the evening, has been allotted to him! Not that it is at all probable Lord Threestars will have any eyes for *her* in the presence of charms so infinitely superior. Alas for the vanity of human aspirations! Lord Threestars, shocked at the very outset by the eagerness with which Lady Bergholt conveys her soup to her mouth, turns for consolation to Olga, and finds her manners all that he can desire. She is always a small eater, and, if amused in conversation, is apt to forget her dinner or to pay very little attention to it. She and Lord Threestars take to each other at once: she is pleased with him, and he is perfectly fascinated by her. Gradually he forgets the very existence of his hostess, who grows every minute more angry and mortified as she watches the pair, and listens in sulky silence to the amiable inanities Lord Blankshire pours without ceasing into her ear. As soon as the ladies have left the room, he whispers to Fred Conyngham, who is a guest, in spite of Mignon's dislike to him,—

"Who is that most charming woman? I did not catch her name. Where have I seen her? Her face is perfectly familiar to me."

"You must have seen her everywhere in town where people congregate," answers Fred. "She is, as you say, most charming. Her name is Stratheden, and she has a history."

And, nothing loath, Fred tells it to his interested auditor.

As the days go on, Mignon has the extreme mortification of finding that, although Lord Threestars pays great attention to her and seems charmed with her society, he is becoming seriously *épris* with the mistress of The Manor House. Fred, only too glad to vex and mortify Lady Bergholt, whom he dislikes as cordially as she dislikes him, has taken Lord Threestars to call on Olga, and my lord has found excuses to repeat his visit more than once. Mrs. Stratheden has issued invitations for a fancy dress ball, and Mignon, much as she hates her rival, cannot make up her mind to punish herself by staying away. But she is determined not to extend Lord Threestars' invitation over the ball, and positively forbids Sir Tristram to

ask him to stay beyond the period for which he was originally invited.

"But, my dear," remonstrates her perplexed husband, "I thought he was such a favorite of yours. You were perfectly delighted at the thought of his coming."

"Some people don't improve upon acquaintance," answers Mignon: "he is one. I think him very conceited, and he bores me dreadfully."

But Lord Threestars is not a man to be balked in his intentions: so from Bergholt he betakes himself to the Blankshires, and thence, for the ball, to Lady Clover's. He has a great partiality for Kitty, and that little lady, not knowing how she is bringing herself into her friend's black books, has been only too delighted to further Lord Threestars' wish to be near Mrs. Stratheden. She is an inveterate match-maker, besides.

"Jo, my dear," she says, patronizingly, to her still adoring husband, "I want your advice."

"Do you, my dear?" he returns, placidly. "That is a new sensation for me. Is it anything about a gown?"

"Gown!" echoes Kitty, derisively. "My dear Jo, I believe you were a hundred years old when you were born. Our grandmothers wore gowns: we wear *toilettes*."

"I rather wish I had been a hundred years old when I was born," says Sir Josias, meditatively. "What an enormous deal of experience I should have gained by this time!"

"Experience!" cries Kitty. "I cannot imagine why any one should want experience. It only means finding out that everything is a delusion and a snare, and learning not to trust anybody or to hope for anything."

Sir Josias smiles benevolently.

"That is not badly put, my dear, but it is rather a one-sided view of the case. But about my advice."

"I want Lord Threestars and Olga to marry each other. How am I to accomplish it?"

Sir Josias looks thoughtful.

"Are you prepared to act upon my advice?" he asks, presently.

"Perhaps; that is, if it should coincide with my own opinion."

"Precisely," smiles her husband. "That is the only advice I ever knew any one take."

"Well?" interrogates Kitty.

"Leave them quite alone, and don't attempt to meddle with their affairs in any way whatever."

Kitty, perched in her favorite attitude upon the table, a habit that is a source of great grief and disgust to the dowager Lady Clover, looks disdainfully at her lord.

"Your advice does not at all coincide with my opinion," she remarks, dryly; "indeed, it is as absolutely worthless as most men's suggestions on similar subjects. Still, dear, as you mean well, and I asked you for it, if you like to come this way I will give you a kiss."

CHAPTER XXX.

"Le type de la femme coquette, 'qui ne connaît d'amour que celui qu'elle inspire,' remonte à une très haute antiquité, puisque Aphrodite est représentée dans l'hymne homérique comme étant elle-même froide et insensible, mais occupée toujours à inspirer d'une façon irresistible les sentiments amoureux aux dieux et aux hommes."

Lady Bergholt's frame of mind is far from enviable. Her affections are not at all engaged, but her vanity is, and to be rivalled by a woman whom she chooses to consider old, *passée*, utterly inferior to herself in personal charms, is inexpressibly galling to her. But it is the secret consciousness of Olga's real superiority that makes her so bitter; it is the inward recognition of a grace, a delicacy, a breeding she lacks herself, that intensifies her hatred of Olga. Fred Conyngham reads her through and through, and takes a malicious delight in punishing her by praising her rival. He is too good a judge to address his praises to her personally, but he takes care that she will be within earshot, and that the qualities he commends with the most enthusiasm shall be those which she most obviously lacks.

Raymond is coming home on purpose for the ball, and Mignon, with a vindictive desire to revenge herself on her husband and Fred Conyngham for their regard for Mrs. Strathe-

den, to show Lord Threestars how perfectly indifferent she is to him, and to punish everybody individually and collectively, has made up her mind to flirt desperately with him.

The night comes and goes: the ball is a perfect success, but some hearts that came light to it go heavily away. When Olga and Mignon come face to face, very different are the feelings which animate their breasts. Olga looks at the loveliness before her, enhanced fourfold to-night, with an admiration as hearty as it is unfeigned, but Mignon, with grudging, envious mortification, is forced to admit that Mrs. Stratheden is capable of looking both young and beautiful. Mignon represents Snow; Olga, as usual in fancy dress, a French marquise. Raymond is a mousquetaire, and uncommonly handsome he looks; Fred Conyngham makes a capital priest from the Barber of Seville; Sir Tristram is a Venetian gentleman, Lord Threestars a distinguished Edgar Ravenswood, and his hostess looks bewitching as a very incorrect representation of Old Mother Hubbard.

"I wanted Jo to come as the dog, with a collar round his neck," says the mischievous little lady, who has not in the slightest degree overcome her love of *persiflage;* "but he would not. It was very ill-natured of him. Then I tried to induce Lord Threestars; but in vain. So the public must kindly imagine that this is the period at which the poor dog is dead."

"You should have asked me," says Fred, who is standing near.

"Oh, you would have looked so ferocious, I am afraid you would have frightened the company," laughs Kitty.

"My bark is worse than my bite," says Fred.

"I don't know," retorts Kitty, archly. "I have seen your capabilities for both."

"I never bite the hand that feeds me," answers Fred, with a smile.

"Don't you?" asks Mignon, meaningly.

"Never!" he answers, looking her full in the face. (Then, with a little bow,) "That is the prerogative of your sex."

"Quarrelling as usual!" cries Kitty. "I am quite sure that, in a previous state, one of you must have been a cat and the other a dog."

"I believe we have all been animals," answers Fred, laugh-

ing: "our sex, lions, dogs, wolves; yours, tigers, and cats, and foxes."

"You have forgotten one species for your sex," interposes Mignon.

"Yes?" says Fred, interrogatively.

"*Bears!*" replies my lady, turning on her heel amid the general laugh, in which Fred joins with perfect frankness.

Mignon flings herself into a reckless flirtation with Raymond, and the pair are so conspicuous for their beauty that they cannot escape attention, as others less remarkable might do. Lord Threestars, who finds it impossible to exchange a word in private with his hostess, so completely is she engrossed with the *devoirs* of the evening, would fain compensate himself with the charms of his late lovely hostess; but she turns her back upon him. This is the hour of Raymond's triumph: this seems a compensation to him for the misery, the loneliness, the longings, of his banishment: he does not guess that his triumph is the result of Mignon's pique, but believes all that his heart most desires to believe. Lady Bergholt will not even grant one dance to his rival, humbly though he prays.

"I have not seen Mr. L'Estrange for an age," she says, with a malicious sparkle in her splendid eyes, "and I have so much to say to him. I have promised to dance every round dance with him to-night."

"Then my case is hopeless," returns Lord Threestars, dropping his glass; "for I could not submit to be tantalized by dancing a square dance with your ethereal Majesty."

"It would be equally useless to ask for that either," says Mignon, audaciously. "I have promised to sit out all the square dances with Mr. L'Estrange."

Lord Threestars replaces his glass in his eye, gives one curious little look at his fair interlocutor, makes his bow, and departs.

Raymond's eyes glow with suppressed fire: he stoops and murmurs something in her ear. A slight color tinges her cheek, and she shakes her head impatiently.

"Do not begin that!" she says, in a low voice. "Come." And, as they glide off together in the waltz, all eyes follow them.

It is fortunate for Sir Tristram that he has elected on this

evening to sit down to whist, so that he is quite unaware of what is generally remarked upon by the rest of the company.

Lady Blankshire, who is the model of propriety, is shocked and disgusted. She calls Olga to her, and makes some very sweeping comments upon Lady Bergholt's behavior.

"What can Sir Tristram be thinking of?" she cries, virtuously indignant. "It is a perfect scandal to the county. I shall certainly not invite her to my house again if she behaves in this manner: it is positively disgraceful. This comes of a man marrying a woman young enough to be his daughter."

Mrs. Stratheden might easily revenge herself on Mignon for many past rudenesses. To be in Lady Blankshire's black books is a very serious thing in the county, and Olga has only to agree with what her ladyship says, as indeed she very well may.

But that is not her way. She is never spiteful and bitter against other women: on the contrary, she makes herself invariably the champion of her sex.

Ah! if women were only loyal to each other,—if they only had the common sense to see how much more they would strengthen their own hands in standing by each other than by taking advantage of every opportunity to pull their own sex to pieces,—they would rob men of the delight they take now in asserting that women are each other's natural enemies. No woman thinks well of a man who speaks against his sex: how should men think well of a woman who is guilty of the same treachery?

Olga does not join in Lady Blankshire's strictures. She excuses Mignon's indiscretion on the ground of her youth, her beauty, the very innocence that makes her parade what, except for it, she would try to hide. Lady Blankshire is not easily pacified.

"Really," she says, fanning herself in a severe and dignified manner, "the present state of society is disgraceful. The manner in which young married women conduct themselves is too shocking. I am determined not to give my countenance to it. What with divorces and *esclandres*, our best families will soon be decimated."

A little later, my lady pours the same indignant comments into Kitty's ear.

"I am quite ashamed of her," answers Kitty, who, in truth,

is extremely uneasy about her friend, "and to-morrow I intend to give her a thorough scolding."

"I fear she is too flighty for any scolding to take effect upon her," says Lady Blankshire, severely. "I think, for the sake of the county, some one should speak to her husband. I have serious thoughts of proposing to Blankshire to do it."

"Oh, no, dear Lady Blankshire! pray don't!" cries Kitty, eagerly. "It would break his heart. Leave her to me. I assure you she does not care in the least for Raymond. It is only some whim she has taken into her head."

"Poor Mrs. L'Estrange!" utters Lady Blankshire, shaking her head. "I always thought her son would turn out badly. She spoiled him so as a boy."

"Oh, please don't be hard on Raymond," says Kitty, who is a stanch little champion. "And, after all, she is so very lovely, it is only natural that he should admire her."

"My dear," replies her ladyship, severely, "there are limits where admiration ceases and impropriety commences."

Well may the general gaze rest on that splendid pair, and well may the more kindly-minded of the spectators say, with a tinge of regret,—

"What a magnificent couple they would have made!"

Raymond's beauty is accentuated by his dress: the white wig he wears throws into relief his clear-cut features, which are lit up with a radiance that extreme happiness can alone give. To the outside world, Mignon must needs seem dazzlingly lovely; but to one who sought the graces of sympathy and tenderness which best beseem womanhood, her beauty would have lacked something. It was the charm that pre-eminently characterized Mrs. Stratheden.

Lady Clover had been amused by Lord Threestars' idea of the two women.

"Lady Bergholt ought to have been born dumb," he said. "She should have been exhibited as some lovely picture or statue, and she would have charmed the whole world. As she is, one is always trying to get amends by her beauty for her extraordinary talent for *froisser*-ing one's tenderest sensibilities. With Mrs. Stratheden, every time she opens her lips she becomes more charming, more fascinating, she endears herself more to one, until one is surprised to find oneself thinking her beautiful. It seems to me that it would be a positive

luxury to have a great grief, only to be consoled by a woman like that."

"I am afraid you are very much in love," says Kitty, with an arch smile.

"I think I begin to know what love means," he answers, in a low voice, "and it is singularly unlike what I imagined it before."

Fred Conyngham is going about with a serene smile, offering liberally to receive confessions from the prettiest women in the room, but in his heart he is furious. Without appearing to remark her, he has been carefully watching Mignon, and his shrewd glance has not failed to appreciate the general view taken of her conduct by the rest of the company. His one great desire is to save his friend the pang of seeing it too: every now and then he glides stealthily into the card-room, and breathes a sigh of relief as he sees Sir Tristram still engaged at whist. He is a good player, and has been used to play a great deal before his marriage; the three other players are as good as himself; and, on the whole, whilst every one is pitying him, he is spending an unusually pleasant evening.

Not until they are driving back to Bergholt does Fred breathe freely.

"Did you enjoy yourself, my darling?" asks Sir Tristram of his lovely wife, as she throws herself back in the carriage with a yawn.

"Oh, yes," she answers, nonchalantly: "it was very well got up, and the dresses were exceedingly good."

"I need not ask if you had many partners," says Sir Tristram, smiling.

At this moment they pass through the lodge-gates, which are brilliantly lighted. Mignon sees that Fred's eyes are fixed intently upon her. The deep color mounts to her unwilling face.

"I did not have *many* partners," she answers, in a defiant tone, "but I danced as often as I felt inclined."

As is frequently the case, no suspicion was aroused in the mind of her husband.

Contrary to his usual habit, Fred scarcely slept at all that night, or rather morning. He was soliloquizing jeremiads over his friend, and breathing out wrath and threatenings against his friend's wife: he had begun to hate her very

beauty, as though it were a leprosy. Selfish and heartless though she was, she was not so bad as Fred painted her: there was no word in his extensive *répertoire* crude or expressive enough to embrace all he felt about her. He *must*, he *would* speak to her, though she ordered him out of the house then and there.

The opportunity he desired was not slow to present itself. There was but one lady guest left at Bergholt, and she, fatigued with last night's exertions, was still in her room. Sir Tristram and two guests of his own sex had gone shooting, very much surprised at Fred's defalcation. Mignon guessed the reason of his remaining at home, and, resolved to disappoint him, hurried away to the wood. But Fred's keen eyes had caught a vision of a white dress flitting past the shrubs, and, in a leisurely manner, he prepared to give chase. He was in no hurry: the task before him required plenty of consideration; it was more than delicate. Mignon, having reached the wood, considered herself perfectly safe, and had not the remotest suspicion of the foe being on her track. When therefore Fred suddenly appeared close beside her, she was the victim of a most unpleasant surprise.

"You make a charming picture, my lady," he says, hating to flatter her as he would hate to give the favorite morsel from his plate to a pampered dog that worried him. But to *aborder* my lady with anything but fair and flattering speech would be to defeat his own object at starting. His words are but simple truth, too. It is a bright, warm morning for late September, and Mignon is clad in her favorite white muslin and lace. She wears heavy gold ornaments, which become her particularly well. My lady has quite a barbaric taste for jewellery, and never thinks it out of place at any period of the day: the novelty of wearing handsome ornaments no doubt enhances her natural love for them.

"I was just going back to the house," she says, rising abruptly, and not attempting to conceal the fact that his company is distasteful to her.

> "A daughter of the gods, divinely tall,
> And most divinely fair,"

quotes Fred, with his most agreeable smile. There is nothing Mignon desires so little as to give her adversary a cue, but she

is innocent of tact, and can never resist saying something snappish to Fred.

So she remarks, with a curl of her upper lip and a slight dilating of the fine nostril,—

"What a very nasty powder you must have hidden behind so much sweet!"

"No," answers Fred, with an assumption of *bonhomie* and a delightful smile. "I wish it all to be sweet this morning. Pray take pity upon me and don't run away. Now, if you would only sit down and talk to me for half an hour, and let me smoke a cigar! I know you are one of the few of your sex who do not pretend to object to it."

"It depends upon who the smoker is," retorts Mignon.

"These are exactly the same cigars that Threestars smokes," says Fred, imperturbably, opening his case. "I assure you the aroma will be precisely the same whether they are in his mouth or mine."

"But you know," answers my lady, who would not throw away a chance of being spiteful to Fred for the world, "one often says one likes the smell because, if one objected, the man would go and smoke somewhere else, and perhaps one likes his society."

"Which does not apply in my case," answers Fred, with as pleasant a smile as though she had paid him a charming compliment.

"Certainly not," agrees Mignon.

"Do you permit me?" he asks, his case still open in his hand.

"Since I am going, it does not matter."

Fred shuts the case with a snap.

"I would rather forego anything than the pleasure of your company. Won't you sit down just as you were? I should like to make a little sketch of you."

So saying, he puts away his cigar-case and takes out a good-sized pocket-book. He is perfectly aware that there is nothing more fascinating to a vain woman than having her portrait taken.

"Can you?" she asks, doubtfully.

For answer he shows her three heads of people who have lately been at the Court: the likenesses are unmistakable.

Mignon seats herself. In the first place, the idea of being

sketched is agreeable to her; in the second, she does not know how to beguile the hours until lunch-time; in the third, a passage of arms with Fred is not distasteful to her, particularly when unrestrained by her husband's presence from hitting as hard as she likes.

"Can you sit still for a quarter of an hour?" asks Fred, beginning to sharpen his pencil.

"I don't know: it is a long time."

"Perhaps it would only bore you," suggests Fred, pausing in his operation.

"Oh, no, not at all."

"I don't know that I am in the vein this morning," says Fred, hanging back in proportion as Mignon is becoming eager. "I can never do anything until I have had my smoke."

"Well, have your smoke," utters my lady, ungraciously.

"Really?" asks Fred. "That is very kind of you." And without more ado, he lights a cigar. "Now I feel happy," he says, leaning against a tree and looking full at Mignon. "You must not mind my staring at you. I want to get you perfectly into my head before I begin."

Then Mr. Conyngham lays himself out to be agreeable. He tells her a host of little stories and scandals, which perfectly delight her. Fred is a capital story-teller, and he is careful to say nothing that can offend young ears, which are generally delicate if inquisitive. So amused is Mignon that she patiently allows him to smoke the whole of his cigar,—a favor he had not counted upon.

"Now," he says, at last, throwing the end away, "may I begin my sketch?"

"Yes, do," answers my lady, quite affably.

"I have only one stipulation," says Fred, beginning to make rather a favor of it: "you must not want to look at it until I have finished."

Mignon promises.

"Now, my lady," says Fred to himself, "I think I have you safe. I can say what I like. Your curiosity won't permit you to run away until I have finished your picture."

CHAPTER XXXI.

"*Gondarino.*—Heav'n, if my sins be ripe grown to a Head,
And must attend your Vengeance, I beg not to divert my Fate,
Or to reprieve a while thy Punishment;
Only I crave, and hear me, equal Heav'ns,
Let not your furious Rod, that must afflict me,
Be that imperfect Piece of Nature,
That Art makes up, Woman, unsatiate Woman.
Had we not knowing souls, at first infus'd
To teach a difference 'twixt Extremes and Good?
Were we not made ourselves, free, unconfin'd
Commanders of our own Affections?
And can it be that this most perfect Creature,
This Image of his Maker, well-squar'd man,
Should leave the Handfast that he had of grace
To fall into a Woman's easy Arms."

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

FRED makes a few strokes with his pencil in silence. Mignon permits her face to expand into a smile, that he may have every facility for making a charming study of her.

"I forget if you know Lady Agnes Lane?" he says, presently, without pausing in his occupation.

"I have met her," answers Mignon. "I don't think her so very pretty: do you?"

"No: she was never one of my beauties. I had news of her this morning. There is a terrible *esclandre* about her, though it has not all come out yet."

Mignon leans a little forward: the misdoings and misfortunes of her sex have a lively interest for her.

"That makes another woman over whose head the waves have closed this season," remarks Fred, busy at his sketch, and only snatching an occasional glance at his fair sitter. "She will never hold up her head again."

"Tell me about it," says Mignon, unwary of the snare that is being laid for her.

"Her husband would have forgiven her; but she would none of his forgiveness, and insisted on rushing blindfold to destruction. 'Whom the gods would slay, they first deprive

of reason.' That applies particularly to your sex, I think, my lady."

"What did she do? Did she run away?" asks Mignon, eagerly, not heeding the comments with which Fred garnishes his tale.

"Would you like to hear the story? I will tell it you. I need not ask you not to repeat it: ladies never do. Your face a little more that way, if you please. Lady Agnes, as every one knows, was poor, and Lane was rich, and a capital fellow into the bargain: it is always your good fellows whom women treat the worst. He gave her everything she could want, and was devoted to her; but, being a woman, of course that was not enough, and she began to cast about her how she might best requite his goodness by treachery."

Mignon, eager to hear the story, passes over Fred's cynical strictures on her sex.

"She had two or three—*flirtations;* then she came across B——; a fellow not fit to black her husband's shoes. He was one of those swaggering snobs for whom women now and then conceive such unaccountable fancies: he had made his reputation through the folly of one weak woman, and he was very proud of it. Lady Agnes fell a speedy victim to his fascinations: it was her pride to *afficher* herself everywhere with him. He was only too delighted to compromise her. The end of it was that, leaving a note for her husband, delicately expressing her weariness of him, and her unconquerable passion for his rival, she fled to B——, who, I am told, was horribly disgusted at a *dénouement* he was far from desiring."

"What a wretch!" cries Mignon, with flashing eyes.

"Which?" asks Fred, quietly. "B——, or Lady Agnes?"

"B——, of course," answers Mignon.

"Lady Agnes, no doubt, looked forward to a blissful future —the world well lost, etc.—in company with the adored one. B——, I hear, was ungallant enough to call her a fool, and to decline to marry her if Lane obtained a divorce. Lord C——, her brother, has threatened to shoot him like a dog if he does not. Now," says Fred, pausing in his sketch, and looking Lady Bergholt full in the face, "picture to yourself that woman's future! She is twenty-three years old; she is devoted to the world, has lived solely upon its pleasures and vanities; she has not a resource within herself. She is now

cut off from society, cannot show her face henceforth where her own set congregate, has given up wealth, luxury, the devoted love of an honest man. What has she gained in exchange? She is thrust upon a man who never loved her, who loathes her now, whom sooner or later she must loathe herself. If they spend their lives together, it will be a hell of recrimination and hatred: if they live apart, they are still tied together by the most intolerable of chains. If she grew weary of a man who heaped her with benefits and never contradicted her, what will she be of a snob who will cover her with humiliations and who has not the redeeming virtue of being rich? She is the fifth woman of position this season who has ruined her future; and the worst of it is," continues Fred, looking full at the fair face before him, "it won't hinder other women from doing the same."

A vivid red mantles in Mignon's cheeks: the drift of his story has just flashed across her.

"Did you come here after me on purpose to tell me that story?" she asks, with kindling eyes.

"Yes," answers Fred, in his quietest voice, apparently absorbed in his sketch. "Don't move, please" (for she makes as though to rise): "it is a pity to spoil your picture for the sake of three minutes."

Fred is calculating the effect of every word, though his tone is as unconcerned as if he were prescribing a remedy for a cold in the head.

"I want to warn you, lest your case and Lady Agnes's should ever become analogous. I do not think, for my own part, that you are a woman to give up rank and wealth for passion's sake; but you are young, and beautiful, and thoughtless, and I think you ought to know how seriously you are compromising yourself."

All this in the same matter-of-fact tone, whilst his pencil sketches on. He does not look up, though he quite conjectures the wrath that flames in those deep-colored eyes.

Lady Bergholt is fairly speechless with astonishment and rage.

"Every one was talking about you last night," continues Fred, mercilessly. "I did not pass a group among whom you were not the topic of conversation. Lady Blankshire said it would be impossible to invite you to her house again."

Fred has hit hard this time.

Mignon crimsons over neck and brow: she positively gasps for breath.

"Lady Blankshire is an old cat," she cries, her rage overcoming her dignity. "And I shall tell her to mind her own business when I see her,—yes, I shall, if she were fifty times Lady Blankshire."

"I think she considers it her business to watch over the morals and manners of the county," remarks Fred.

"I will do as I like, in spite of her," cries Mignon, in a passion of impotent wrath.

"It was not only Lady Blankshire," proceeds Fred, remorselessly; "there was not a woman in the room who did not condemn you,—except Mrs. Stratheden."

"Mrs. Stratheden!" shrieks Mignon, fairly beginning to cry with rage. "I believe it is all a wicked plot of hers, and that she has been spreading shameful, abominable lies about me. Or else" (with flaming eyes) "it is you,—yes, you and she between you."

"What I told you is gospel truth," says Fred, quite unmoved, "and I have told you because it is right that you should know. I do not tell you from any love for you, as you know: how could I care for you, when your husband is the greatest friend I have in the world, and I see you breaking his heart! The truest, loyallest heart in the world!" cries Fred, bursting into passion; "and you would see and know it—if you were not a woman. What do you think you would gain by exchanging him for that handsome, ill-tempered young fool L'Estrange? How you would hate each other in a month!"

"How dare you mix up my name with his!" cries Mignon. "And what is it to you?"

"Pardon me," says Fred, gravely. "It is you who have mixed up your name with his by ostentatiously devoting the whole of last night to him, by permitting him to betray in every gesture, every look, his passion for you, which I must say he did in the face of every one with a singular want of delicacy or consideration for you. And you ask what it is to me? Personally, nothing. It can only affect me through the man who is my friend. Forgive me if I say that I have had pleasanter visits at Bergholt before you were châtelaine

here, and if it pleased you to give up your châtelaineship by your own act I might look forward to pleasanter visits again. So, you see, my advice is not prompted by any selfish interest, —rather the other way. Once more allow me to say, If you are not prepared to sacrifice everything for Mr. L'Estrange, do not draw down upon yourself the censure and the coldness of every woman in the county."

Mignon is fairly cowed. It is a bitter pang to her vanity to hear that she has incurred the disapproval of society, and Fred's utter indifference to provoking her wrath is not without its effect.

She is silent whilst Mr. Conyngham adds a few rapid touches to his sketch.

"I have finished," he says, jumping up as if no unpleasant dialogue had taken place between them. And he places his sketch before Mignon. He has made it as charming as possible, though the task of embellishing nature in this instance was not easy.

Mignon condescends to look, in spite of her wrath, and, looking, is mollified.

"May I have it?" she asks.

"Certainly. I had no other intention in making it than of presenting it to you, if you deigned to accept it."

Not another word is said on the previous subject, and, as they walk towards the house together, a casual observer might believe them the best friends in the world. As they reach the hall-door, Lady Clover's carriage is coming up the drive.

"I am so glad you have come!" says Mignon, heartily. "How did you manage to get away?"

"Oh, the men have gone shooting, and the women are doing needlework and tearing their friends to pieces. I pleaded important business. Oh, dear! how late we were last night! But what a charming ball! Mr. Conyngham, I did not confess half my iniquities to you. You must tell me where I left off, and I will finish the recital,—but not now. I am quite tired, and my head aches. Mignon, take me to your boudoir."

"This is unlucky," murmurs Fred to himself. "I guess the errand my little lady has come on. Two in one morning will be too much. She will just spoil the effect of mine."

Lady Clover and her hostess take their way to the boudoir;

but, once there, all Kitty's languor vanishes; she shuts the door firmly, and, placing herself before Mignon, says, resolutely,—

"I have come to scold you. I am very angry with you indeed. How could you behave so last night?"

Now, Lady Bergholt is chafing and furious from Fred's attack, and is not at all in the humor to receive a second lecture: so, instead of taking impetuous Kitty's remarks in good part, she stiffens her back, and says, with extreme *hauteur*,—

"I beg your pardon. I do not understand you."

Lady Clover is a little taken aback.

"My dear," she says, with more dignity than one would expect from so small and youthful a personage, "I have come here at great inconvenience this morning, solely for friendship's sake, to warn you."

"That is what all meddlers and busybodies say," retorts Mignon. "I can only say I regret your having put yourself to great inconvenience on my account."

"Mignon!" cries Kitty, surprise and anger fighting for mastery.

"Lady Clover!" says Mignon, defiantly.

Kitty is half minded to turn her back upon her friend and go home again. She walks to the window to collect herself; whilst Lady Bergholt sits down calmly and plays with a paper-knife: the old, mulish look is on her lovely face.

Presently Kitty comes to the table.

"I am not going to quarrel with you," she says, gently. "I have not known you very long: still, we have been friends, and I am fond of you. Do not be angry with me! I am only saying to you what I would say to my own sister, if I had one."

Lady Bergholt is silent.

"I do not believe you care about Raymond really," proceeds Kitty, earnestly: "then why should you let him compromise you?"

"Compromise!" repeats Mignon, angrily. "I am sick of the word!"

"Has some one else been talking to you?" asks Kitty, eagerly. "If they have they are quite right. Oh, Mignon! I know you don't mean anything, but Raymond does: it is a

triumph to him for you to let him devote himself to you as he did last night, and every one was talking about it and shrugging their shoulders. And Lady Blankshire——"

"I don't care a pin for Lady Blankshire!" cries Mignon, wrathfully. "I suppose I have my own position in the county, and am not dependent upon her patronage."

"I am afraid," says Kitty, reluctantly, "that if she went against you, all the county would go after her. But don't let us suppose such a thing for a moment!—she won't go against you: you won't give her cause. Is Raymond worth it?"

"Yes," answers Mignon, wilfully. She does not mean it, but a passionate resistance has been roused in her.

"What!" cries Kitty, aghast.

"If you are tied to an old man you don't care for," says Mignon, coldly, "what more natural than to fancy a man who is young and handsome and who adores you?"

Kitty feels a chill creeping through her veins: she was not prepared for this.

"Do you mean to say," she whispers, in a horrified voice, "that, having a husband like Sir Tristram, who is so good to you, who worships you, who has given you everything you possess, you, you dare to—good heavens! how shall I say it! —you dare to think of another man as—as a lover?"

"Why not?" asks Mignon, defiantly. She is in a reckless mood, and takes a pleasure in making herself out ten times worse than she is. "You are similarly circumstanced: you ought to understand. I dare say if you took a fancy to a young man, you would do very much as I do."

"Never!" cries Kitty, with passionate energy. "If I thought I could be false to the man who trusts me, and to whom I have sworn to be faithful, I would drown myself or take poison! If I felt myself beginning to care for any other man, I would go to my husband and confess it to him, and never see the man again. To be so mean, so base! to take all a man can give you, to swear to be true to him, and then to treat him with contempt, as if he were a thing to be despised, just because he loves and trusts you so entirely! Oh, I can understand a woman whose husband ill-treats her, who is cruel and unfaithful to her, revenging herself by flying to another man,—small revenge, poor soul, if she is a woman;

but a man who has heaped you with benefits, whose heart you break by your wickedness——"

"Pooh!" says Mignon, coldly: "don't be so high-flown! I am not gone yet."

"How are you going to stop? Where do you intend to draw the line?" cries Kitty, exasperated. "If you are only playing with Raymond, and leading him on, what will he do when he finds you out? And if you behave to him and let him behave to you as you did last night, how will you make the world believe there is no harm in it?"

"Harm?" exclaims Mignon, reddening. "What do you mean?"

"Ah," returns Kitty, "I dare say you don't know the sort of things men think and say about women: I don't suppose Sir Tristram tells you. *They* don't believe in a woman flirting with a man and letting him make love to her harmlessly: they are so wicked themselves, and their minds are such sinks of iniquity, things that seem trifles to us they magnify into enormities. Do you think *I* would give them a chance to sneer at me, and say horrid things behind my back, and shrug their shoulders at me, when all the time I knew I was virtuous and innocent? Pah!" (with a gesture of disgust), "it is so common nowadays to be lightly thought of, it is something to make oneself respected."

Mignon's eyes are ablaze with wrath.

"If you came here for the sole purpose of insulting me, Lady Clover," she cries, "I am sorry you put yourself to the *great inconvenience* of coming."

"No, no, dear," cries Kitty, running to her; "I came with nothing but kind intentions as friend to friend, as you might have come to me if our positions had been reversed."

Mignon pushes her away.

"You are no friend of mine," she says, wrathfully; "and I only hope I shall never see you again. I shall not trouble Elmor with *my* presence, you may be quite sure; and I hope you will not give me the trouble of refusing to see you by coming here."

"Do not be afraid!" answers Kitty, whose temper is thoroughly roused by this time. "May I trouble you to order my carriage? I will walk towards the lodge, and it can overtake me."

With this she opens the door and departs. Fred is in the hall; he sees that something serious has happened, and follows her in silence as she leaves the house.

"Your mission has been unsuccessful, then?" he whispers, as he walks beside her down the avenue.

"Don't speak to me! don't look at me!" cries Kitty, with tears in her eyes. "I hate everything and everybody! I should like to burn every man and drown every woman! All men are wretches, monsters, selfish, wicked, good-for-nothing creatures; and as for women, they are——"

"What?" asks Fred, calmly.

"Worse!" cries Kitty, in a fury. "I have no patience with them."

"And pray what are you?" says Fred. "Are you wicked, and a wretch, and a monster?"

"Worse! worse! it is a dreadful word to say, but I am a F O O L."

"Ah, my dear little lady," answers Fred, "we can most of us lay that flattering unction to our souls at some period of our lives. Now let me translate your mystic language. In the goodness of your heart, you came to give your fair friend a little advice, and she has not taken it in the spirit you intended it."

"I was never so insulted," cries Kitty. "She positively ordered me out of the house, and begged I would never enter it again."

"Unfortunately, you see," says Fred, "I, innocent of your excellent intentions, had just been performing the same office; and two lectures in one morning proved too much for our lovely hostess, who, by the way, has a bit of a temper."

"If I had only known!" laments Kitty. "And the trouble and inconvenience I put myself to to come!—the excuses I had to make!—the stories I had to tell! Oh, what shall I do?" (suddenly breaking off). "Here comes Sir Tristram. What can I say to him?"

"Kitty!" cries Sir Tristram, as he approaches, "and coming *away* from the house! What does this mean?"

Kitty excuses her departure in so innocent and plausible a fashion that Fred says to himself,—

"What fools we are to think so much of Macchiavelli, when there is one lurking in every petticoat! I've got a

pretty cool head, I flatter myself, but *I* couldn't have got out of it in that fashion."

"What made Kitty start off just at lunch-time?" Sir Tristram asks Mignon.

Fred, the only other person present, is anxious to hear her answer.

"She is an odious little hypocrite," answers Mignon, vindictively, "and I never want to see her again."

"I trust you have not been quarrelling?" says Sir Tristram, looking distressed.

"Yes, we have, very much quarrelling," answers my lady.

"What on earth about?" asks her husband.

"Nothing that concerns you," replies Mignon, meeting his inquiring eyes full.

"For telling you a lie, and looking you straight in the face, commend me to a woman!" soliloquizes Fred.

I am ashamed to chronicle his savage cynicisms on the fair sex; but some men are such brutes, and I hope all lady readers will revenge themselves by detesting him.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"And let me ask, How can that crime be considered pardonable in a man which renders a woman infamous? . . . Men in the pride of their hearts are apt to suppose that nature has designed them to be superior to women. The highest proof that can be given of such superiority is the protection afforded by the stronger to the weaker. What can that man say for his pretension who employs all his arts to seduce and betray the creature whom he should guide and protect?"

Sir Charles Grandison.

Kitty is boiling over with wrath as she drives home from her unsatisfactory interview with Mignon. To put yourself to considerable inconvenience for friendship's sake, to drive many hours in the hot sun for the purpose of telling a truth that, however unpalatable, is none the less the truth, to assume, after much consideration robbed from sleep, the delicate and difficult rôle of Mentor, and in return for all these sacrifices offered at the shrine of friendship, to be morally slapped in

the face, is naturally very injurious to the feelings. Kitty is disposed to forswear friendship forever, and to take a jaundiced view of human nature. Had the patient and sympathizing Sir Jo been with her, she would doubtless have poured her wrongs and resentment into his kindly ear; but the drive gives her leisure to cool down, and by the time she drives into the gates of her own park she has come to the conclusion that she will spare herself the mortification of confessing her failure.

"Because," she argues to herself, "Jo *might* say, 'If you had asked my advice, I should have recommended you not to interfere,' and then I should be obliged to quarrel with him, and, though I hate every one, I would rather not quarrel any more to-day, because it makes me feel bad afterwards."

So the little diplomatist decks her face with smiles, answers all questions about her morning's drive as gayly as though it had been crowned with perfect success, and deludes every one as completely as she desires.

Kitty has a kind little heart, if her temper is warm; the sun rarely sets upon her wrath; and before night she has forgiven Mignon's treatment of her (though she does not intend ever to go to Bergholt again unless atonement is made for her late injuries), and is casting about how to retard or stop the impending ruin of her wilful friend's life.

"Olga would be the person," she says to herself: "she has so much more tact and patience than I have. But then Mignon hates her so. Ah!" as a thought strikes her, "but she might talk to Raymond: she has a great deal of influence over him. Let me see! I can't very well go to her to-day or to-morrow, but I can write to her, and, happy thought, send the letter by Lord Threestars."

Lady Clover retires to her boudoir and indites a letter, long, and copiously underlined, to Mrs. Stratheden. This she encloses in two envelopes, in the outer one of which she slips a little note: "Don't read the inside letter until you are alone. Send a line or an empty envelope back by Lord T., that the poor man may not be put to the blush by knowing that I am only giving him this commission as an excuse for making him happy."

"Oh, Lord Threestars!" cries Kitty, innocently, putting her head into the smoking-room, "I wonder whether you would do something for me?"

"You need not wonder," he returns, gallantly: "you ought to be quite sure."

"I want most particularly to send something to Mrs. Strath-eden, and I *must* have an answer this evening. Would you mind riding over with it?"

"I shall be delighted," answers my lord, with alacrity.

"Oh, thanks! it is *so* good of you. Will you ring and say what horse you will ride? and I will just finish my letter."

"What a little darling she is," soliloquizes Lord Threestars, —"worth fifty of her lovely friend at Bergholt."

It is not far from midnight when Olga has leisure to peruse Kitty's letter. She, too, has been thinking much about the events of the previous evening, and is smitten with pity not only for Sir Tristram, but for his wilful wife. With Raymond she is more than half disposed to be angry.

"As if I or any one else could do anything!" she says, sorrowfully, as she lays the letter down. "Raymond has been spoiled all his life; now his desires have become necessities. His moral perceptions are blunted, and the only sense of honor he has would dictate him to fight the husband after ruining his happiness. I don't, I cannot, think she is a woman to sacrifice herself for love's sake; but if she goes on as she began last night, she will almost as effectually ruin her position and embitter her future. If Raymond would only go away! How dare men pretend to call such selfishness love!" murmurs Olga, indignantly.

In the end, she resolves to make the effort to influence Raymond for good. All her guests are to leave early on the morning next but one, and she writes to ask him to come to her. And with the morning he comes.

"And so you are alone once more. Thank heaven!" And, with a sigh of relief, he throws himself into one of the luxurious chairs in the boudoir where he has been ushered. "What a bore it is to have people in the house!—one can never call one's soul one's own. That's the one redeeming point of my mother's *delicacy*, as she calls it: we are not troubled by many visitors. Well," for Olga is looking at him half indulgently, half sadly, "what can I do for you? First of all, though, let me tell you what you must be heartily sick of hearing by now,—the ball was the most perfect thing in the world: no one but you could have done it in the country.

And" (his eyes kindling) "it was the *very* happiest night of my life."

"Was it?" asks Olga, quietly. "It ought not to have been."

"Why?" asks Raymond.

"Because, my dear," she returns, firmly, "you were probably doing more harm than you ever did in your life before."

His handsome brows bend.

"Good heaven!" he exclaims, petulantly. "I trust you have not sent for me to read me a lecture."

"No, not to lecture; that is too hard a word; not even to advise; only to *entreat* you, for your own sake and for hers."

Raymond shakes his head impatiently.

"These things are not to be argued and reasoned about. Great love soars above cut-and-dried maxims and petty moral precepts."

"Selfish love does; not *great* love. Those who think themselves able to soar above the laws that honor and right have dictated must fall sooner or later. To love perfectly is to desire of all things the welfare of the beloved one,—to be ready even to sacrifice self for her sake."

Olga's voice is low and pleading: she does not wish to irritate him.

"All that sounds very fine, and would read extremely well in print," he retorts; "but what man who really loved ever put such theories into practice?"

"Many!" answers Olga, warmly: "only the world seldom hears of them: they don't publish their devotion in the shame of the woman they profess to love."

"Shame!" echoes Raymond, hotly. "That is a word coined by prudes and hypocrites: it does not apply in cases like these. A man meets, too late, the woman he feels God created for him; some flaw of Fate has made her another's: he takes her and makes her honorably his so soon as the power is given him. Where is the shame?"

Olga could almost smile at this strange perversion of right, if she were not so grieved. To reason about right and wrong is waste of time, she feels: so she tries another tack.

"How can you reconcile it to your pride," she says, "that the woman you loved should in every way be the worse for you?"

"How the worse?" he cries, indignantly, starting up and pacing about the room; "how the worse? I may not be as rich as Sir Tristram, but I am rich enough to gratify the whims of a woman not too unreasonable. I certainly have no title; but don't you think that my love would compensate her for one or two paltry worldly advantages."

"Advantages, too, that would be of no use to her when she had placed herself out of the pale of society," adds Olga, calmly.

She has dealt a hard blow, but she meant it. He looks up at her with eyes flashing with wrath.

"So you too," he cries, stung to the quick, "are like the rest of your sex, delighted to trample upon another woman, particularly if she is beautiful?"

Olga looks up quietly at him.

"Raymond!" she says, simply; but it is enough.

"No, no!" he cries. "Forgive me: I know you are not. But why did you say such a hard thing?"

"Because I do not want, either for myself or the rest of my sex, to have the delight of trampling upon her. And, between ourselves, Raymond, do you not think Lady Bergholt is a woman who particularly prizes social honors and distinction? Don't you think in your heart of hearts that, once the glamour of love gone, she would sorely miss the things she sets such store by now? Of course I have no means of knowing whether she cares for you: I can but be like the rest of the world, and judge by what I see. Now she is the lovely Lady Bergholt, courted, admired, surrounded by all her heart can desire, shielded by a love that cannot, I think, be less than yours. If she leaves her husband for you, there must be a period during which she will be disgraced and compelled to hide from the world. When you had made her your wife, she would be pointed at, looked askance at, subject to a thousand humiliations; and if at last she lived it down, it could only be when the best years of her life were gone. For a very long time you would both be compelled to lead a life of great retirement and seclusion to ward off the penalties society inflicts on those who defy her laws. As yet you are comparatively children; you both love pleasure and excitement: life is now open at its fairest page for you, and with your own hand you want to blot out all its promises and to turn it to misery and disappointment."

"It will only be open at its fairest page for me," cries Raymond, "when Mignon is mine. And in spite of all your remarks, my dear, which I have read a thousand times in books, but which I admit gain immeasurably by your charming voice and eloquent eyes, I believe that our love would compensate us for all the arrows the world might, and no doubt would, launch at us."

Olga is forced to admit herself foiled in her second attack. She tries a third.

"And do you believe in your heart," she asks, looking at him steadily, "that Lady Bergholt has any real feeling for you beyond a momentary caprice, a wilful, childish desire to set the proprieties at defiance and assert her own freedom and independence?"

This is a bold stroke, and Olga is perfectly aware on what delicate ground she is treading; but she puts the question in a natural voice, as though it were one of the simplest nature. And Raymond, taken unawares, answers her quite straightforwardly.

"I *do* believe she cares for me. It is true she always turns the subject, and pretends to laugh when I want her to be serious; but that is her way. And, after all" (with a shade of bitterness), "who can understand a woman?—what man, at least? I suppose you see through each other, and that's why you think so little of each other."

Olga smiles.

"I forgive you, my dear: when you are older you will know better. It is a trick of very young men, burdened with the weight of their vast experience, to sneer at and speak lightly of women: as the years go by, if they are worth anything, they learn to think differently. There must be something very wrong about the man who, after twenty or thirty years' experience of women, has only evil to record of them."

"I wish you would come down from that altitude of wisdom that your superior age gives you," laughs Raymond.

"It is such a very doubtful advantage that I am glad to make all I can of it," answers Olga, in the same vein.

But she is infinitely reassured in her mind. If Raymond has been unable to win Lady Bergholt to a serious frame of mind, there is, she thinks, comparatively little harm done. She does not recur to the subject, and Raymond, glad to be

let off so easily, does his best to make himself agreeable. After lunch, Olga rides back with him as far as the gates of L'Estrange Hall, and they part the best of friends.

Meantime, the subject of all this discussion is in a state of high dudgeon, and, short of running away with Raymond, she is ready to do anything to show her contempt and defiance of her officious advisers. Mr. Conyngham's pungent remarks had made a decided impression upon her, and, but for Kitty's unfortunate visit, might have taken root and flowered into discretion; but innocent, well-meaning little Lady Clover had stirred up the seeds of wrath and defiance in her heart, and entirely choked all that Fred had sown. My lady cast about her how best to outrage the proprieties and fling up her pretty heels in the face of "that old cat," Lady Blankshire. And, after considerable reflection, a very pretty piece of mischief comes into her head. Fired by the success of Mrs. Strathcden's fancy-ball, she has determined to give one herself; and we may be sure that when she asks Sir Tristram's consent with an excellent grace, being rather deferential on account of the largeness of her request, he accords it with but slight hesitation. The invitations are all issued when the brilliant inspiration that is to shock and defy the whole county comes into Mignon's lovely head. When Sir Tristram looks over the list of the invited, among whom are included the Earl and Countess of Blankshire, he observes that the names of Sir Josias and Lady Clover are missing.

"Why, my love," he remarks, in surprise, "you have forgotten the Clovers."

"Oh, no," replies Mignon. "I do not intend to ask them."

Sir Tristram knits his brows, and says, with more firmness than is his custom when addressing his wife,—

"I would rather not give the ball than that it should be a cause of affront to some of our most intimate friends."

"She insulted me," cries Mignon, "and I will certainly not ask her."

"What did she do? what did she say?" asks Sir Tristram. "If you will tell me the real state of affairs, it may lead me to think differently."

"I tell you she insulted me," answers Mignon, sulkily. "I think you might take my word for it, without asking any more questions."

"But," says Sir Tristram, smiling, "you fair ladies are apt to fall out about matters that our graver minds treat perhaps too lightly. Come, darling! what did she say? Did she tell you that your gown was unbecoming, or that you had a freckle on your nose?"

"You may laugh as much as you please," replies Mignon, with dignity, "but I tell you she insulted me, and that *I* won't write the invitation."

"Then I must," says Sir Tristram, and accordingly does.

But Kitty is by no means behind her late friend in spirit. Observing that the card is filled up in Sir Tristram's hand, she writes a curt little note, regretting that Sir Josias and she are unable to accept Lady Bergholt's invitation. Excepting that Mignon would like Lady Clover to be witness of the act of defiance she intends to commit at the ball, she is not at all displeased. She considers herself a much greater personage than Kitty, and thinks the latter will be the sufferer by their mutual coldness.

When the answers arrive, Mignon is disappointed to find that, in consequence of a visit to be paid in the South, Lady Blankshire will not be present at her ball; but the refusals are very few, and she counts on a goodly gathering. To Fred's surprise, she has insisted on his coming back for it after a visit further North: he is unsuspicious of any treachery lurking behind her civility, which has greatly increased since their conversation in the wood.

"She is afraid of me," chuckles Fred. "Next to love, there is nothing it is so desirable to inspire as fear." And he consents with quite a good grace, though balls are not in his line.

More than once, Mignon has been asked what she intends to wear, but she only smiles, shakes her head, and says, "You will see when the time comes." Sir Tristram does not ask twice: he only imagines that she intends to charm every one by some pretty little caprice. So when, on the evening of the ball, she appears simply but most becomingly dressed, as Marguerite, every one is surprised.

"Nothing could be nicer," says Sir Tristram, with a fond smile; "but, my dear, I think there was hardly any necessity for so much mystery."

Fred, who is gifted with a rapid intelligence, is seized by a

horrible misgiving, which he tries to pooh-pooh. "She would not dare!" he says to himself: "he *could* not do it!"

Most of the invited have arrived. Raymond is one of the few tardy guests. Fred, from some unaccountable instinct, has kept near his host and hostess, but for a moment has crossed the room to speak to Mrs. Stratheden. They are chatting together, when suddenly he catches sight of something that causes him to start and turn a shade paler. Olga follows the direction of his eyes: "I was right. D—n her!" mutters Fred, savagely, between his clenched teeth. Then his eyes meet Olga's, which wear a startled look. "Excuse me a moment," he says, and follows Raymond, who is making his way to his host and hostess. He is dressed as Faust. This is the little surprise that Mignon has prepared with so much delight and secrecy for her friends. Raymond looks more than usually handsome: there is an unwonted color in his cheeks, and his eyes sparkle with uneasy fire. Fred, close upon his heels, scrutinizes narrowly the bearing of Sir Tristram and Lady Bergholt. He sees the former turn a shade paler, and his wife smile and blush; then he joins the group. On every side he sees curious, wondering looks; people are whispering together. At this moment he could without pity have seen Mignon burned at the stake. But Fred has tact, and he puts on his most jovial air.

"How are you, L'Estrange? What a capital get-up! If I had only known, I would have come as Mephistopheles."

"It would have become you admirably," says Mignon.

Fred is close beside her,—Raymond has turned to speak to some one else,—and he whispers in her ear,—

"I would rather be your good angel and kick Faust out of the house."

Mignon colors, and Fred turns away with a smile, as if he had been saying the pleasantest thing in the world.

Marguerite takes Faust's arm and walks through all the rooms, leaning confidingly upon him, and smiling up in his face. Raymond is not acting a part: the looks which he bends upon Mignon are the expression of his feelings, and out-Faust Faust. The more delicate-minded of the guests feel uncomfortable, the others laugh and shrug their shoulders.

"A pretty strong order, that!" remarks one man to another.

"Why does not Sir Tristram kick him out of the house?

I would." Thus the men. Then the women: "Did you ever see anything so shameless? I shall certainly never come here again."

"There will be no one to call on, I should think," is the significant reply,—"unless you come to condole with Sir Tristram."

"Poor man! Did you see how pale he turned? I pity him sincerely. She is good-looking, of course, but she must be a horrid woman."

"Quite too horrid. I dare say she will be much more in her element when she has put herself beyond the pale of society."

Olga has followed Fred, and is talking gayly to Sir Tristram, though her heart is heavy within her. He does his best to second her efforts, but he is evidently *distrait*, and his face looks haggard. Presently he makes an excuse and leaves the ball-room. Fred, who has been watching him, follows at a distance.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"Ever saying to himself,
'Oh I that wasted time to tend upon her,
To compass her with sweet observances,
To dress her beautifully and keep her true!'
And then he broke the sentence in his heart
Abruptly, as a man upon his tongue
May break it, when his passion masters him."

Enid.

Sir Tristram goes to his study, closing the door behind him. He feels as though a heavy blow had been dealt him. To be openly disgraced where he has given nothing but love and kindness,—in his own house, too, before his own friends and servants, to be made a butt for ridicule and contempt.

"It is my own fault!" he groans, putting his hand to his head. "I should have stopped it before."

There is a sting keener even than the shame: he feels that to have done a thing like this in the face of the world, Mignon

must love the man for whose sake she did it. An exceeding bitterness creeps into his heart, and he buries his face in his hands. The faint strains of the music, the sound of the voices and laughter, are borne towards him: in the midst of his pain, he remembers that he is host in a house full of guests, each one of whom has curious eyes to pry into his heart, and quick wit to notice if he suffers. He has to be strong, and smile out the rest of this hateful night, to be mindful of every courtesy, every hospitality due to those around him. And he is to do this with a smiling face, whilst his heart aches as it has never ached before, except, perhaps, upon his marriage-day.

The door opens softly, and Fred comes in. He walks straight up to Sir Tristram, and lays a hand upon his shoulder.

"I won't make any apology for intruding," he says, in a low voice. "It is the privilege of a friend to come in when others are shut out."

Sir Tristram looks at him, but makes no answer. His face seems quite drawn and old.

"I don't think this affair is much to be deplored," Fred continues, quietly: "it gives you the very opportunity you have been wanting so long."

"What opportunity?" asks Sir Tristram, absently.

"Why, of turning that impertinent young scoundrel out of the house."

"Of course he shall never set foot here again," answers Sir Tristram, wearily; "but I can't make an *esclandre* and turn him out of the house to-night. I can't do that, if it is only for her sake."

"For *her* sake!" retorts Fred, savagely. "A good deal of consideration I would show her: she has been so thoughtful about you, hasn't she? However, for your own sake you won't have any *esclandre:* it is simple enough to get him out without that. Send for him here, and request him to go: he cannot refuse."

"If I send for him, that will publish the whole thing at once."

"Not in the least. I will make an excuse to get him here."

"So be it!" answers Sir Tristram; and Fred goes. He does not make straight for his goal, but stops to laugh and joke with various friends on the way: he seems in the most radiant of moods. Presently his keen eye lights on the couple he is

in search of. Marguerite is still leaning on Faust's arm, but another partner is evidently claiming her reluctant hand. Ultimately she withdraws it from Faust, who looks darkly at his rival.

"L'Estrange, come and help me, like a good fellow!" says Fred, walking up with a beaming face. "There is something wrong with some of my petticoats, and I can't find a servant about."

Without being churlish, Raymond cannot well refuse: so he sulkily follows Fred, who throws gay words right and left as they pass through the crowd. When they have traversed the corridor that leads to Sir Tristram's study, and are quite alone, Fred turns, and, in a harsh, curt voice, and with an expression of face strikingly unlike the one he wore a minute ago, says, pointing to the door,—

"Sir Tristram is waiting for you there."

Then he finds a servant, and orders Mr. L'Estrange's carriage.

Raymond is no coward, but his heart gives a very decided throb as he finds himself on the eve of a scene that under no circumstances can be a pleasant one. It is a horrid sensation to feel oneself thoroughly in the wrong. Somehow, it has not occurred to him to think of Sir Tristram interfering: he has borne so much that the idea of his turning now has seemed improbable. Of course he would not like it; but what cared Raymond for that? He was perfectly aware that by yielding to Mignon's wish he was compromising her to the last degree; but it served his selfish purpose to do that. He acquitted himself of all dishonor and meanness by telling himself that he meant to marry her.

As his hand is on the door, he feels that matters have come to a crisis. In another moment the two men are face to face. Sir Tristram is no longer doubtful or vacillating: his face wears an expression of stern determination: he looks a study for Velasquez in his rich dark dress. The scene altogether would make an admirable painting,—Raymond's handsome face set off by his gay dress, his figure clearly defined against the sombre, dimly-lighted background.

"You wished to see me?" he asks, in a voice he cannot quite command. To conceal its tremulousness he is forced to make it defiant.

"I did," Sir Tristram answers. "I have a question to ask of you."

"Pray ask it," returns Raymond, with a veiled sneer.

"Did you know," Sir Tristram asks, in a cold, calm voice, "that Lady Bergholt was to wear the dress of Marguerite to-night?"

Raymond hesitates. He has no thought of telling a lie, but the question embarrasses him. His eyes turn away from his host's, and travel slowly round the room. He is perhaps looking for inspiration; but none comes, and he is forced to answer,—

"Yes, I did."

"Then," says Sir Tristram, his voice trembling a little from the pain and anger that gnaw his heart,—"then, as you have perpetrated a gross and deliberate insult upon me, and have wantonly compromised Lady Bergholt by your indiscretion, you will perfectly understand me when I request you to leave my house and *never* to enter it again."

Raymond is not prepared for this. To be turned out of the house like a beaten hound, to have the tables turned upon himself, the laugh against himself, Sir Tristram victor instead of vanquished! His eyes flash with angry fire.

"I assumed the dress by Lady Bergholt's express desire," he says. "It was entirely and solely her idea."

He is glad to wound the man who is humiliating him.

"Perhaps," Sir Tristram answers, quietly. "I have no more to say. Since I have expressed my wish to be free from your presence, I presume you are gentleman enough to take the hint and go."

"What!" cries Raymond, furiously. "Do you think I will submit to be kicked out of the house like a dog before the whole county? If you are mean enough to violate every law of hospitality, do not think I will tamely brook so public an insult. If I go, I go on the understanding that you give me full and ample satisfaction for the affront. You understand me, Sir Tristram!"

"Yes," Sir Tristram answers, gravely, "I understand you perfectly. But I have a word to say to you before you go, Raymond. I have known you since you were a baby, I have nursed you upon my knee, and all through your boyhood I have looked upon you almost as a son. This house has been

open to you as though it had been your home. Have you ever had anything from me but kindness? I never asked nor wanted anything from you in return, but I surely might have expected that you would not basely creep to my hearth to steal from me the thing that is dearest to me in life: I might have expected that you would refrain from trying to dishonor me, to cover me with the world's contempt and ridicule. On whose side is the reparation owing? Satisfaction! by that you mean, I presume, standing up at twelve paces to shoot at each other. There would be no satisfaction to me in having your blood upon my head, and my wife's name blazoned with infamy to the world. I think you know me too well to suspect me of cowardice. Return to the ball-room if you please, make what excuse you choose, but, if you are a gentleman, in half an hour from this time I *expect* you to leave this house, and not to re-enter it until I ask you to do so."

There is a door leading from the study to his dressing-room, and, without another word, he opens it and goes, leaving Raymond half mad with wrath and shame. Left to himself, the latter stands biting his nails, and muttering furious imprecations. He would like to have some vent for his fury, to make a ruin and havoc about him, or to burst into violent rage of words against some one or something. He feels he cannot command his face sufficiently to appear in the ball-room again. He wants to get away quietly, without being seen. As he stands irresolute, the door is pushed open, and Mr. Conyngham comes in.

"Your carriage is at the door," he says, quietly.

For a moment Raymond looks as if he would spring at Fred's throat: then, with a tremendous effort, he controls himself, and says, with a sneer,—

"Thanks for your good offices. I shall not forget them. Will you say *au revoir* to Lady Bergholt for me?"

"I will make your adieux to her," answers Fred.

Raymond dashes through the hall to his carriage. Fortunately, he meets no one whom he knows on the way.

"Home, and drive like ——!" he cries to his astonished servant.

He has only one thought in his heart,—revenge!

"She *shall* be mine now, if I die for her!" he says, over and over again, between his clenched teeth.

He forgets, ignores, that he has been wrong from first to last, that he has been treated with a gentleness, a forbearance, almost more than human: he is burning with the rage of wounded vanity, and he hates Sir Tristram as only the wronger can hate the wronged.

Fred, having seen the last of the discomfited Faust, returns to seek his friend.

"Is he gone?" the latter asks.

"Yes, thank God! and not a soul the wiser except Hoskyns. Now, Tristram, there is still something left for you to do: the happiness of your whole future may depend on it."

"What is that?" asks Sir Tristram.

"You must take a high hand with your wife about this affair. Unless I am very much mistaken, she will treat you to a pretty scene about it; but you must nip her in the bud. Tell her that, in consequence of her folly, she has made herself and you the talk of the county; threaten to take her abroad, or to send her home to her parents: in short, you must frighten her. If you don't, by this time to-morrow, mark my words, you will have sent L'Estrange a humble apology, and he will be here more than ever."

"I do not think that," answers Sir Tristram, with a faint smile. "Now" (looking at the clock) "I must go and act out this dreary play. It is nearly three-quarters of an hour since I left the ball-room."

"All right!" says Fred, grasping his hand. "Look as bright as you can. Anyhow, you have got the best of it this time."

And so Sir Tristram goes and plays his part for three long weary hours. He has a smile and a courteous word for all, he forgets nothing that hospitality and good breeding dictate, and people, having got over their first little shock of surprise, affect to ignore what has happened, and enjoy themselves amazingly. It is not long before Raymond's absence and Lady Bergholt's vexation are observed, and the correct conclusion arrived at that Raymond has been kicked out, and that it serves him perfectly right.

Fred treats himself to a little piece of revenge. He approaches Mignon, whose eyes are seeking Raymond in every direction, and says, in a voice perfectly audible to those around,—

"I am charged to make you L'Estrange's adieux."

"Is he gone?" asks Mignon, horribly mortified to find herself blushing crimson.

"Yes," returns Fred, with his false air of *bonhomie:* "those good-looking young fellows are always so sensitive about their appearance. He was dissatisfied with his dress, thought it didn't suit him, and that he had made rather a fool of himself by wearing it: so he is off. I have just seen the last of him."

Mignon knows not what to say. She is confounded. Oh, if she could kill Fred with the lightnings from her eyes! She turns away, and says, rather ungraciously, to the man beside her,—

"As Mr. L'Estrange is gone, I can give you his waltz."

My lady is not a good adept at dissembling, especially her anger, and, in consequence, rather overacts her part, and seems too pleased, too eagerly delightful, too unnaturally gracious to her guests, for the remainder of the evening. She is burning to get Sir Tristram alone, to pour out the vials of her wrath upon him, to heap him with every cruel taunt that her ingenious mind can frame; for she surmises well enough that he, aided and abetted by Fred, is the cause of Raymond's sudden departure. As she well deserves, this night, instead of being a triumph, is one of bitter mortification. It is almost, if not quite, the most miserable one of her life.

At last, at last, the final adieux are made, the final compliments paid and graciously received, and Mignon mounts with hasty steps to her room. So hot and eager is her wrath, she will not wait for her maid to unplait her long hair. As soon as her dress is unfastened, she dismisses her, and, throwing a morning wrapper round her, goes swiftly towards Sir Tristram's room. Her cheeks burn, her hands are icy cold, there is a hard glitter in her deep eyes: a woful time seems in store for the hapless husband at the hands of this lovely vixen. She knows not how to commence: there seem no words bitter enough for her anger.

Sir Tristram is expecting her. He still wears his Velasquez dress, and is leaning against the chimney-piece waiting for her. He wants to spare her: in spite of his just anger, he cannot shake off the yearning tenderness that, for the punishment of his sins, he still feels for her.

My lady enters rapidly, and shuts the door behind her with a portentous bang.

"I have come for an explanation," she cries. "What do you mean by disgracing me before every one? What do you mean by insulting the best, the only friend I have in the world? How dare you——"

"Stop!" thunders Sir Tristram.

Surely he is the most long-suffering and patient of men, but he is human, and has the passions that animate the breasts of other men. He meant to be gentle with her, but, fortunately for himself, she has provoked him beyond endurance. Her furious looks, her insolent words, are not to be brooked.

"I have forbidden L'Estrange the house: he never sets foot in it again whilst I am master here. If you are so shameless, if you have no heed of your own reputation, I shall take care you do not disgrace me: I am not quite the dupe and the fool that my mistaken tenderness for you has made me seem. Now" (pointing to the door) "go, and, for your own sake, if you are wise, never again refer to the events of to-night. It will be difficult enough for me, as it is, to forget them."

Mignon is completely cowed, as a bully always is when he has aroused the wrath of a generous nature: she bursts into tears and creeps quietly back to her room, and there, at the risk of spoiling her fine eyes, she cries and sobs until, wearied out at last, she falls asleep, dressed as she is, like an angry child.

For the next few days she is rather in awe of her husband, and behaves better than usual. He is exceedingly kind to her, and, contrary to his custom of late, goes out riding and driving with her, now their guests have left; but there is something in his manner that makes her feel he does not mean to be trifled with. More than once they have seen Raymond in the distance: it is evident that he wants to waylay Mignon, but on seeing her companion he has always avoided them. At first my lady is maliciously amused at his discomfiture, but after a little while she begins to resent Sir Tristram's espionage, and declines either to drive or ride, but escapes from the house when his back is turned, and takes long, solitary walks.

The old harassed look comes back to Sir Tristram's face; the lines deepen round his eyes. Where are the rejuvenating influences he had pictured to himself, in his folly, that mar-

riage with a young and lovely woman would exercise upon him?

"What is to be the end of it? what is to be the end of it?" That is the thought that haunts him day and night now. "She never loved me, and now she is learning to hate me for a spy and a tyrant."

Fortunately, a diversion occurs in the shape of an invitation from a neighboring magnate to Sir Tristram and Lady Bergholt for a week's visit. The house has the credit of being an exceptionally pleasant one to stay at; it is a house, too, where the lady guests affect much magnificence and variety of plumage, and Mignon is at once immersed in the consideration how she shall equal, if not exceed, the splendor of all the other women.

On the day of leaving Bergholt, just as she is putting on her hat to start, her Abigail demurely presents her with a letter.

"Oh, if you please, my lady, as Thomas was out exercising this morning, he met Mr. L'Estrange, who said he was to give this to me to give to you."

Mignon colors ever so little, and thrusts the letter into her pocket.

"If you please, my lady," says the maid, dropping her eyes discreetly, "shall I give any answer to Thomas for Mr. L'Estrange."

"No," answers my lady, sharply.

It so happens that, in the excitement consequent upon this visit, Mignon entirely forgets the letter for two or three days, when one morning, happening to wear the same dress, she takes it out of her pocket by accident.

I will not shock the reader by a transcription of Raymond's letter, which, as may be supposed, was one that no man could be justified in writing to a married woman.

Mignon reads it, laughs, and throws it into the fire. She had almost forgotten his very existence. My lady is enjoying herself thoroughly, and has two or three fresh and devoted admirers.

People remark that Sir Tristram is a most complaisant and indulgent husband: it is strange that, with such a young and lovely wife, he should not seem in the least jealous of her. Poor man! they little dream what an utter relief it is to him

to see her appearing to take pleasure in the society of any man who is not Raymond.

This may be considered by some a very negative state of conjugal bliss; but it is sometimes the only kind that falls to the lot of a doting husband or wife.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"And though she saw all heaven in flower above,
She would not love."

SWINBURNE.

AFTER this visit, which Mignon enjoys immensely, she finds Bergholt grievously dull. To make matters worse, a heavy rain sets in, and lasts for three days. My lady, who has no resources in herself, is at her wit's end how to kill time. She wishes now she had not quarrelled with Kitty, for then she would have gone to Elmor to spend some of the weary hours that oppress her so dismally. Her thoughts revert to Raymond, and she begins to feel a renewal of anger against her husband for what she considers his tyranny. Certainly, in spite of Raymond's occasional fits of temper, it had been very pleasant having him to flatter and make love to her, and teasing him was a most agreeable pastime. She begins to feel quite fond of him, and has serious thoughts of writing an answer to his long-neglected effusion. Matters stand thus when Sir Tristram is summoned to London on business.

"Would you like to go to The Warren for two or three days?" he asks his wife. "Or you might stay in town, and have one of your sisters with you."

"No, thanks," returns Mignon, imagining Sir Tristram makes this proposal because he is afraid to leave her, and determined to balk him.

"Will you telegraph for Mary or Regina to come here, then? I fear, my darling, you will be very dull all alone."

"Not duller than I am now," Mignon replies.

Sir Tristram winces, but says no more.

"If the weather clears, as I should think it must soon," remarks my lady, "I shall drive about and call on some of the people."

"Do!" answers her husband, cordially. "There is a fresh box of books, too. I don't know whether you will care for any of them."

"I don't suppose so. I don't care for any but Miss Broughton's."

Sir Tristram is to be away four days, including those of his departure and return. My lady has determined on a bold scheme. She will see Raymond in spite of her husband's prohibition. He can but be angry if he finds her out.

"There is no crime in my seeing him; and I shall if I like!" argues the wilful fair one. So, the day previous to Sir Tristram's departure, she indites a line to Mr. L'Estrange, telling him that, if he particularly wishes to see her, he may do so the next morning about eleven in the little summer-house at the end of the wood. In spite of the pouring rain, she drives into the town, and posts the letter with her own hands.

Sir Tristram's train leaves at ten, and, when he has started, Mignon dons her hat and saunters about the gardens for some time in view of the house. The weather has cleared at last, and the morning is bright. But everything is unpleasantly wet after the heavy autumn rains, every bough and twig glistens with drops, the paths are moist and sodden, and altogether it is a great deal pleasanter overhead than under foot.

Mignon, having promenaded for some time in view of the windows to avert suspicion should any one be watching her, strikes presently into a path that leads to the kitchen-garden and out of it again by a roundabout way to the wood. Long before she comes to the place of rendezvous, she sees Raymond watching for her. He comes eagerly towards her, catches both her hands in one of his, and with the other makes as though to draw her to him. But Mignon eludes his grasp, and says, with a little nervous laugh,—

"I have no doubt you are very glad to see me; but you need not be quite so demonstrative."

Raymond is too happy at seeing her to quarrel with her, but he feels chilled by her reception. When absent from her,

he has always taken it for granted that she cares almost as much for him as he does for her.

"And are you not glad to see me?" he asks, looking at her as though, after his long abstinence from the sight of her lovely face, he could never look enough.

"Of course I am. If I had not wanted to see you, I should not have written to you and taken the trouble to go out in the wet to post the letter myself."

"Where is *he?*" asks Raymond, curtly.

"*He?* Oh, *he* is gone to London, and won't be back until Saturday."

"And he left you here alone? Was he not afraid that I should come and carry you off before he came back?"

"Apparently not," laughs Mignon. "Have you nearly done staring at me?"

"No, *that* I have not," he answers, impressively. "And if you knew how I have longed and hungered for the sight of you, you would not ask. You are more lovely than ever."

"I cannot return the compliment. What have you been doing to yourself? You look quite pinched and old and yellow."

"What have I been doing? I have been eating my heart out. I have been going through the torments of the lost every day and every hour since I saw you."

"How silly!" says Mignon. "As if any one was worth doing that for!"

"It is easy to see that you have not suffered in that way," remarks Raymond, bitterly.

"No, indeed," answers Mignon, frankly. "I have found something better to eat than my own heart; and I can always sleep, thank goodness."

"Why did you not answer my letter? Would you not, or could you not?"

"Well, to tell you the truth," replies Mignon, with that utter disregard of people's feelings that she has almost brought to a science, "I put the letter in my pocket and forgot it, and then, when we were at the ——s', I never had a moment to spare to answer it."

Raymond looks at her. The expression of his face is hardly lover-like.

"Is this a little piece of acting?" he says; "or am I the

most infernal fool and dupe that ever breathed the breath of life?"

"Don't be cross!" urges Mignon, persuasively.

"Cross!" he repeats, laying an accent of withering scorn on the word. "When are we going to understand each other? When will you be woman enough to lay aside your tricks and jests and show that you care for me?—if you do," he adds, after a pause, looking intently at her.

"See what we got by my showing that I cared for you!" pouts Mignon. "You are forbidden the house, and I have to come out and meet you here at the risk of I don't know what if I am found out."

"Do you mean to say that he dares treat you unkindly?" cries Raymond, hotly.

"Of course he does," answers Mignon, assuming a martyrized air. "I should like you to have seen him that night of the ball when every one was gone."

"Then, dearest," cries the young man, passionately, catching at her hands, "won't you give me the right to protect you from his violence? won't you trust me to make the future happy for you,—to atone to you for all the misery of the past?"

Mignon has a keen sense of the ridiculous: she cannot help being very forcibly struck by the ludicrousness of the idea of Raymond protecting her from her husband's violence. She is very near bursting into a fit of laughter, but is afraid of offending Raymond irretrievably. But for his extreme vanity, it would be almost impossible to conceive how he can entertain the delusion that Mignon really cares for or would sacrifice anything to him. The practical evidences of her indifference, of which she has been so unsparing, have all been atoned for by occasional fits of kindness, and by her flattering treatment of him in public, regardless of the world's criticisms. He does not for a moment realize that her behavior has been the result of sheer wilfulness and inexperience; he chooses to imagine her as learned in the world's ways as himself, and to argue that she must have counted the cost before compromising herself with society. If, too, he had not cast a wilful glamour before his eyes, Raymond, from his intimate knowledge of Sir Tristram, could hardly have failed to recognize the absurdity of supposing him capable of treating

any woman, far less the one he idolized, with cruelty or violence. But his own uncurbed, unbridled passions have made him ignore or doubt generosity and power of self-control in others. As for Mignon, she no more considers the risk she incurs by playing with fire, than a person might do who amused himself with a box of lucifer matches over a tub of cold water, into which he might throw them at any moment. And here, though I take no pains to screen her heartlessness and utter inconsiderateness, I must exonerate Mignon from the consciousness of grave impropriety. She is very young and really very innocent, or I might express myself better by the word ignorant: she has not, never has had, the least intention of allowing Raymond to make love to her more than by admiring words: she would as soon think of throwing herself into the lake as of running away with him: but she likes the spice of romance that his devotion to her casts over a life which threatens to become monotonous.

So, in answer to his impassioned words, she says, repossessing herself quietly of her hands,—

"Oh, he is not really so very terrible, and I am not at all afraid of him."

"But even then," utters Raymond, in a disappointed voice, "is your life worth having as it is? Can you go on wasting your best years without love or sympathy, without hope or change from the dreary routine of days spent with a man to whom you are hopelessly indifferent?"

"Oh, I might be worse off," remarks Mignon, philosophically.

"Your ideas seem rather of a negative shade," says Raymond, bitterly. "You can live without happiness, perhaps?"

"I am happy enough sometimes," she answers. "At all events, I am never *un*happy; only bored sometimes. And last week at the ——s' I was *tremendously* happy."

A feeling of impotent wrath comes over Raymond.

"Why did you send for me?" he says, roughly. "You mean nothing: you are only playing the fool with me. I wish to God I had gone a hundred miles in the other direction!"

They are in the summer-house now. Mignon has thrown off her hat, and the sunbeams are playing hide-and-seek in her hair through the narrow window.

He looks with envious discontent at her beauty: his moods

are always somewhat akin to those of the savage, who divides his time between cursing and adoring his divinity.

"I wonder," says Mignon, reflectively, looking with perfect calmness at the anger in his handsome face,—"I wonder if you could be with me ten minutes without quarrelling? Why can't you be reasonable?"

"Reasonable!" he echoes, contemptuously. "I wish" (with angry earnestness) "you could change places with me for ten short minutes, and then perhaps you would not ask that question."

"Thanks. I would rather be myself. It must be very disagreeable to have a raging volcano in one's inside that is always going off like fireworks when one least expects them. Good heavens!" (in an accent of lively agitation), "here comes one of the keepers. What shall we do?"

"Do!" says Raymond, in a low, energetic voice, as she jumps up, blushing violently. "Why, sit still and keep quiet, of course! Go on talking naturally. We have often been here before. I don't suppose," (with a sneer) "that Sir Tristram has offered a reward for my head if I am caught on the premises."

"I wish I had not come!" utters Mignon, crossly.

"I thought you were brave," remarks Raymond; "but I suppose you are so cowed by this time that the merest trifle daunts your courage."

"Stuff!" says Mignon, sharply. "I don't care a bit for any one; but I hate to feel as if I were caught doing something I ought not. And of course he knows all about it: trust servants for that! I shouldn't wonder if some of them sent him here to spy. If I thought so" (vindictively), "I would turn them all off at a moment's notice!" And my lady looks quite capable of it. "I tell you what," she adds, after a pause: "ride boldly up to the house to-morrow, and ask for me as you used to do."

But Raymond's pride forbids him to place himself in so false a position. Mignon is too perturbed for him to get any serious talk out of her to-day: so, after a time, this eminently unsatisfactory interview (for him) is brought to a close, and, as she declines to meet him in the same place again, it is arranged that he shall join her in her ride the following after-

noon. So Mignon takes a smiling leave of him, but he goes moody and frowning homewards.

An uncomfortable doubt has begun to take possession of his mind,—not whether the game is worth the candle, but whether the candle will ever see the game played out. He had expected to find her softened, more tender, less brusque and wilful, but she is the same Mignon as ever; she even seems to have slipped further from his grasp.

The next day, however, my lady is all smiles and pleasant words. She feels a good deal more secure on horseback with her servant in attendance than she did in the wood, and indulges herself in a thorough flirtation, fearless of Raymond taking any undue advantage of her complaisance.

The morning after, she receives a letter from her husband:

"My Darling,—

"I arrived here last night—I cannot say, with perfect truth, in safety, for in jumping from the carriage, most foolishly before it had quite stopped, I slipped and sprained my ankle. However, don't be the least alarmed: the accident is not at all serious, though a little painful, and the most inconvenient part of it is that it will detain me here longer than I intended. Now, don't you think, dearest, that a week's solitude will bore you a good deal? I know your gregarious nature. I do not for an instant want you to come up on my account, or unless it would really amuse you; but the moment you feel dull, telegraph, and I will secure comfortable rooms for you and send for one of your sisters. You might like to do some shopping and go to the theatres. I only propose this for your sake: don't dream of coming for mine. P—— is attending me, and Fred is here. With best love, my darling,

"Your most affectionate husband,

"Tristram Bergholt."

To do Mignon justice, she is exceedingly sorry about Sir Tristram's accident; she has even a momentary thought of going to London to nurse him; but, after mature deliberation, she comes to the conclusion that as his hurt is not serious, and she is really likely to be better amused at home, she will not go, at all events not at present. She is seized with a brilliant idea, upon which she acts when she meets Raymond the same afternoon.

"Does your mother know anything about your quarrel with Sir Tristram?" she asks.

"Not a syllable. I should never have heard the last of it. Why?"

"Because I have been thinking," proceeds Mignon, gayly, "that though you are forbidden my house, I am not forbidden yours, and as I am quite alone" (laughing), "your mother might think it only kind and neighborly to ask me over to spend the day."

Raymond's face lights up with pleasure.

"By Jove! what a fool I was not to think of it myself! When will you come?—to-morrow? She will be only too delighted."

"Perhaps I ought to wait for an invitation," suggests Mignon.

"I will ride over and bring it the first thing to-morrow morning," cries Raymond, eagerly.

"You forget," says Mignon, maliciously, "that you are forbidden the house."

He frowns.

"I *had* forgotten it: thanks for reminding me. I will send a servant."

"All right: do!" answers Mignon. "No one can make any remark as long as I am with your mother."

"Are you beginning to be afraid of what people say?" asks Raymond.

"No, not afraid. But I would just as soon not give them a chance. And I will tell you how you shall amuse me. I want to learn to jump. You must teach me. Have a bar or hurdles put up in a field, and put me on one of your hunters. I mean to hunt this winter though Tristram shakes his head, and next year," she adds, triumphantly, "I mean to cut out Kitty and Mrs. Stratheden in the Row."

The following morning, a servant brings a kind little note from Mrs. L'Estrange begging Lady Bergholt to come over and spend a long day with her, and apologizing for her long neglect. Mignon is bent on ingratiating herself with Raymond's mother, and behaves with unusual gentleness and discretion.

She expatiates much on her dulness at Bergholt now her husband is away, and kind Mrs. L'Estrange presses her warmly to repeat her visit whenever she feels inclined.

Raymond excels as a host: nothing can be more charming than his solicitude for the *bien-être* of his fair guest. Mignon feels that she has never liked him so much before. The leaping lessons are a great success: Lady Bergholt has an excellent seat, and is perfectly fearless. The jumping practice is continued in their rides on the days which Mignon does not spend at The Hall. On the whole, she thoroughly enjoys her husband's absence, though there is a reverse to this as to most pictures. One day she drives to call upon Lady Blankshire, and is received with freezing politeness; another day, when riding with Raymond, she meets the barouche of another magnate, who makes but the slightest return to her somewhat effusive greeting; on another occasion she passes Kitty, who turns her head in the opposite direction. My lady's vanity is wounded, but she still thinks herself strong enough to defy public opinion.

"This is all on your account, I suppose!" she says to Raymond, with an angry sparkle in her blue eyes.

"My darling," he replies, tenderly, "it hurts me awfully to think you should have to bear anything for my sake."

"I am not your darling," she retorts; "and if I find I cannot hold my own, I shall appease society by cutting you."

For a wonder, Raymond does not make an angry answer. He has been strangly patient of late: either he is tired of endeavoring to file down the rough edges of her temper, or he is trying fresh tactics.

It is three weeks before Sir Tristram is able to return to Bergholt, and when he comes he looks very thin and pulled-down. Mignon has a slight qualm of remorse.

"You have been worse than you told me," she says, kissing him quite affectionately. "Why did you not send for me to nurse you?"

"I don't think nursing is your vocation, my darling," he answers, drawing her on his knee, a familiarity which she, for a wonder, permits. He looks at her with fixed eyes: if possible, he feels he loves her more devotedly than before.

"You are lovelier than ever," he cannot resist saying.

"Suppose, now," she says, turning suddenly serious, and thinking of words once spoken by Raymond, "that I were smashed in a train, or had the smallpox: would you still be as fond of me?"

He puts his hand before her mouth.

"Hush!" he says. "Don't speak of such a thing."

"But should you?" she persists.

"Yes," he answers, "I hope so; I think so. By the way, have you heard that your people are talking of a trip to Italy this winter?"

"Regina wrote something about it. Are they really serious?"

"Yes; I believe they start in a fortnight. Mary came up to see me nearly every day: you cannot think how good she was. I don't know what I should have done without her."

"Ah," laughs Mignon, "you ought to have married her, as I told you."

"Ought I?" he answers, tenderly. "I don't think so."

"Tristram," says my lady, suddenly, "I have something to tell you. Will you promise me not to be angry?"

A misgiving that has tormented him these three weeks grows in breadth and depth.

"What is it?" he asks, with involuntary coldness.

"I don't think I shall tell you," she says, laying her blonde head against his dark one. "I don't like the tone of your voice."

There is a pause.

"There is only one thing you could do that would vex me very much," utters Sir Tristram, in a voice he cannot quite command; "and I hardly think you would willingly give me so much pain."

"And what is that?" she asks, half coaxing, half defiant.

"To have had L'Estrange here, or to have met him elsewhere."

"Of course I have not had him here. As if I should, after all the fuss you made!"

Sir Tristram experiences a sense of relief.

"But," says Mignon, and the misgiving returns.

"But what, my dear?"

"But I had a note, a most kind note, from Mrs. L'Estrange, asking me to spend the day; and I thought you did not want her to know there had been anything disagreeable: so I went."

There is silence. Presently Sir Tristram says, in a voice the calmness of which is hardly natural,—

"Did you go only once, or more than once?"

"I went twice," answers Mignon, afraid to reveal that she has been double that number of times.

"And," continues her husband, still in the same tone, "did you see—Raymond—upon any other occasion?"

"I met him out riding?"

"More than once?"

"Oh, really, I am not going to be cross-questioned as if I were in a witness-box," cries Mignon, pettishly, jumping up. "I met him,—that is enough; and I was an idiot to tell you. It is much better to be sly than straightforward. I shall act upon that next time. And if you only married me for the pleasure of bullying and tyrannizing over me," adds my lady, with a voice ever crescendo, "I wish I had never seen you! It was all papa's doing, and it was a great shame of you both." And Mignon, having sent the poisoned shaft well home, takes flight, and leaves the man who loves her in speechless pain.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"But there, where I had garnered up my heart,
Where either I must live or bear no life;
The fountain from the which my current runs,
Or else dries up; to be discarded thence!"

Othello.

Sir Tristram's ankle is a long time getting well. It is a considerable trial to him to forego hunting, to which, after several winters spent out of England, he has looked forward keenly. Mignon has been extremely anxious to ride to the meets, but her husband has always refused his consent.

"I will drive there with you as often as you like," he says, "but I cannot ride, and I do not think it would look well for you to be seen there with only your groom."

Mignon is exceedingly put out about this new piece of tyranny, as she considers it, and, as she cannot go as she likes, pettishly refuses to go at all.

December has come. They have had a party in the house for pheasant-shooting, and paid a couple of visits. Gerry has

spent a few days with them: the rest of the Carlyle family are wintering abroad.

Mignon has amused herself tolerably well, but Raymond's patience is wellnigh worn out. He sees her occasionally, for, in spite of her husband's displeasure, she continues to meet him now and then by appointment, and he writes to her frequently. Sir Tristram exercises no surveillance over the post-bag, and my lady's letters are invariably brought to her by her maid whilst she is dressing. Raymond's letters amuse her: there is a pleasant spice of danger in this correspondence,—a feeling of doing something she ought not; though, as far as her own letters go, there is nothing in them that might not be proclaimed by the town crier.

Raymond is growing ill, wretched, desperate: people are beginning to comment, too, upon his changed appearance: he feels himself no nearer his love and his vengeance than he was six months ago. He can no longer deceive himself with the idea that Mignon really cares for him, but his passion is rather increased than decreased by her indifference. Sometimes he vows to go to the uttermost parts of the earth to get away from her, and then the sight of her golden hair, her dark-blue eyes, and her lovely, laughing mouth, witch him back, and he finds it impossible to tear himself away. He is reaping the punishment of his uncurbed passions. Sir Tristram is hardly to be envied, but his life is positive bliss compared with Raymond's.

For some days, Mignon has been preparing for an act of rebellion. There is to be a meet four miles distant,—in fact, not far from L'Estrange Hall,—and she has made up her mind to ride there.

"Look out for me," she says to Raymond. "I shall be there, and, what is more, I mean to follow."

"You won't," answers Raymond, moodily: "he will not let you."

"You will see," says Mignon, with sparkling eyes. "Mind you are there before me."

And that night, at dinner, my lady says, with an innocent face, to her lord,—

"I am going to ride to the meet on Wednesday."

The servants are in the room. Sir Tristram only smiles, and says, "Are you, my dear?"

"Yes," she replies, firmly, though she feels a little nervous: "so, when you see me start, don't say I did not give you fair warning."

Sir Tristram makes no answer; but when they are alone he says,—

"My darling, I hope you were only in jest when you spoke of riding to the meet. You know, I think, that I give way to you in almost everything: but I have a very great objection to this, and I trust you will not vex me by pressing it further."

My lady has arranged in her own mind exactly what she will say if her lord proves contumacious, and she now proceeds to say it without the least pity or compunction. Her cheeks glow with a soft carmine, there is unmistakable fire in her eyes, and no one looking at her could doubt for a moment that she is quite in earnest. She has not yet learned to command her voice, which is always several tones higher when she is displeased.

"Before I married you," she says, "you promised that I should do everything I liked. Now you try to tyrannize over me in every possible way; and I won't bear it. I *won't* bear it" (crescendo). "And if you don't let me go on Wednesday, I will leave you and go straight off to my own people, if I have to beg my way to them."

The expression of Lady Bergholt's face and the accent of her voice bespeak such thorough determination that Sir Tristram is utterly stupefied. And the reader will, I have no doubt, be out of all patience with him when I chronicle the fact that he offers no further opposition to her going.

But he loves her: he would do anything in the world rather than separate himself from her, and he believes her capable of carrying out her threat. After all, he is not the only weak and foolishly fond husband on record. All he does is this. He sends for the head groom on Tuesday evening, and tells him that Lady Bergholt will ride to the meet next morning, and bids him keep close beside her, in case her horse should get excited and troublesome.

"And remember," he adds, in an accent of unmistakable authority, "I do not suppose for an instant that Lady Bergholt will wish to follow, but, in case she should, you will say you have my positive commands not to do so."

He is horribly anxious lest some evil should befall his

darling, whom you and I, reader, do not think such a very great treasure.

Mignon is radiant as she mounts her horse next morning. When the weaker vessel does get her own way by the strong hand, she is always very proud of it; and my lady is no exception.

"You will not *think* of following," are Sir Tristram's parting words; but she makes a defiant little *moue* in answer, that causes his heart to throb with a painful misgiving.

"Remember!" he says to the groom, as she rides off, in a tone as impressive as that in which King Charles the Martyr made his memorable utterance.

"Yes, Sir Tristram," answers the man, with stolid gravity, as he touches his hat. But to himself he says, "How the plague does he think I'm agoing to stop her, if he can't?"

"You see," cries Mignon, triumphantly, to Raymond, as she canters up. "I told you I would come, and here I am. And now," she adds, gayly, "I mean to enjoy myself thoroughly."

Several men come forward to greet her, and ask if she is going to follow; and she answers, laughing, "Yes, and I mean to have the brush."

"So you shall," answers the Master, cordially, with a glance of genuine admiration at her lovely face, "if the other fair Amazons cut me dead for it."

"I thought so," remarks the groom to himself. "I might as well try to stop her as the beck in a flood. Well, I can but lose my place. She's master of him, so she's like to be master o' me." And he sits down philosophically in his saddle, not altogether displeased with the idea of a run. "For of course," he reflects, "if she do go I am bound to foller."

Seeing Raymond in attendance, no one ventures to offer Lady Bergholt a lead: indeed, he is probably the only man who does not consider the office a bore. A man must be very much in love to *like* to give a woman a lead, particularly in her first experiment across country. Raymond has no intention of letting his fair charge incur any danger, and, as he knows there is no enjoyment for himself in the way of sport to be got out of to-day's run, he thinks more about the chances of a long, pleasant ride back along the lanes, where there is more scope for conversation than in the hunting-field. The

hounds are not long finding: the business of the day is about to commence. Jackson rides up to his mistress and salutes her respectfully.

"Beg pardon, my lady—Sir Tristram gave me *most positive orders* as you was not to follow." He has placed his horse right in front of her.

"Get out of the way! What do you mean?" cries Mignon, imperiously; and Jackson has no alternative but to fall back and follow.

"Don't lose your head, don't pull your horse at a fence, and keep close to me," says Raymond, as they break into a gallop.

It is very easy going at first, and Raymond knows every inch of the country: so that Mignon is in an ecstasy of delight and enjoyment. It is a short run,—under three miles, and she is actually in at the death. The Master brings her the brush.

"And well earned too, by Jove!" he says, gallantly, as he presents it.

Mignon is radiant with delight and excitement. She has never looked more lovely. Raymond is full of pride and triumph as he sees the glances men cast upon her.

Presently another fox is found in a wood belonging to Mrs. Stratheden, and they are off again. Raymond is beginning to feel more confidence in Mignon's riding, and leads the way over rather a bigger fence. Her horse takes it perfectly, and away they sail again. They are somewhat separated from the rest of the field. Raymond has formed his own opinion as to the line of country the fox means to take, and is bent on a short cut.

The next fence is a very easy one: he scarcely stops to look behind until he hears a loud cry from the groom. With difficulty he reins in his excited horse and turns. Never, never, if he lives to the longest span that is allotted to man, will he forget the horror of that time. Lady Bergholt and her horse are both struggling on the ground, and as he turns he sees the chestnut strike out twice in its endeavor to rise, he hears the dull thud of the blow against the human flesh, and in a moment that exquisite face, the delight of every one who gazed upon it, is turned into a sight appalling enough to sicken the strongest man. Raymond is off his horse in a second: it gallops away after that other riderless one. The groom, too, has

dismounted, and holds his horse's bridle, whilst he looks with blanched face from Raymond to the horrid spectacle at their feet. Raymond is no coward, but he has highly-strung nerves: he has almost a woman's shrinking from painful sights. And now the woman he *has* loved,—for his love is all gone and buried in horror now,—the woman whom he has tempted to rebel against her husband, is lying mangled before him, and he feels that her blood is on his head. Is she dead? For one wild moment he almost prays she is: it seems a less awful fate than to live changed from one of God's loveliest creatures to a spectacle that will make men shudder: he would fain fly from the sight himself, would fain ride away for help and leave the groom by her side, but every spark of manliness cries out against it. And so, for his heavy doom and punishment, he kneels down and takes into his arms this form whose face is crushed out of knowledge and hidden by blood, and there, with his ghastly burden, he stays what seems to him an eternity, whilst the groom gallops away for help. She is not dead: she begins to writhe in his arms; she even puts up a hand to tear at her wounds; he has to hold it by main force. He feels as though his reason would leave him, the horror is so intense, and all the time his stricken conscience is crying aloud to him, "This is God's judgment upon you!"

It is not in reality ten minutes, though it seems a century to Raymond, before there comes the sound of voices and of hurrying feet. They place her on a rudely-constructed litter, and he has to walk by the side, still holding her hand as she groans and writhes, unconscious though she is of any word spoken to her. And when they reach the door of the little village inn, the host says to him, "I'm afraid we can't get her up the stairs, poor lady, unless you carry her in your arms, sir." And again, white and shuddering, Raymond must take up this terrible freight, that, half an hour ago, would have been so dainty a burden, and carry it to the bedroom on the first floor. Then he makes as if to leave the room.

"Oh, please, sir, won't you stop till the doctor comes?" cries the affrighted landlady: "I durstn't stop with the poor soul alone." And mechanically Raymond sits down in a chair and goes through another century of agony. A thought comes to him: he will send for Olga: she is always the one to turn to for help and sympathy. So he curtly bids the

landlady send some one to tell Mrs. Stratheden what has happened: he knows she will lose no time in coming. At last the doctor arrives.

"You had best not stop here," he says, gently; "and the groom is waiting to see you."

No sentence of reprieve to a doomed man could be more joyful than these words to Raymond. He staggers out of the room, and down-stairs, where a crowd is gathered. The groom separates himself from it and comes out.

"If you please, sir," he says, "won't you go and break the news to my master?"

Raymond reels as if he had been struck.

"I!" he says. "*No. I cannot.* You must go."

"Begging your pardon, sir, but I won't," says the man, resolutely. "He gave me positive orders not to go; and it wasn't my fault, but I can't face him."

"Get my horse," mutters Raymond, and, sick and white, he mounts and rides away in the direction of Bergholt. And still the words are ringing in his ears, "This is God's judgment upon you." He rides like the wild huntsman; he is ghastly white and covered with blood; the few people who meet him stand aside, scared. He does not draw rein till he comes to the avenue, and there, standing on the steps, evidently on the lookout for some one, stands Sir Tristram.

As Raymond rides up, blood-stained and looking like death, the first thing that occurs to Sir Tristram is that he has had a bad fall and has come for assistance. He forgets his anger and animosity, and cries, in kind, anxious tones,—

"You are hurt, my boy. Where is it. What can we do for you?"

Raymond reels out of the saddle and stands staring and stammering: his tongue cleaves to the roof of his mouth. Two servants run out.

"Take Mr. L'Estrange's horse. Get some brandy," Sir Tristram cries to them. "Here, my boy, lean on me!" But Raymond waves him off and falls staggering against the door.

"It is not me," he gasps. "Lady Bergholt—White Hart Inn—Allington." And then he swoons dead away, and is for the time relieved of his intolerable agony.

Sir Tristram stands for a moment as though a blow had been dealt him. "The dog-cart," he says, in a trembling voice; and

one servant flies to the stables, whilst another leads off Raymond's horse, and a third tries to pour brandy down his throat. In an incredibly short time the dog-cart is round, and Sir Tristram in it: he has to take that fearful drive in utter uncertainty, conjecturing the worst from Raymond's horror-stricken face, from his terrible agitation and the marks of blood upon him, for he is still insensible. The White Hart is six miles distant: they do it in half an hour, but to Sir Tristram it seems half an eternity. Will his darling be dead? Oh, pray God not! he can bear anything, he thinks, if only her life be spared. Little knots of twos and threes are standing near the inn door: they slink away as he drives up, and he augurs the worst. In the passage, Olga meets him, and draws him towards the little parlor.

"She is not dead," she whispers, hurriedly, anticipating him. "Mr. Thorp does not think she will die. I have telegraphed for P——, and also to Leeds for Dr.——."

"Let me go to her," murmurs Sir Tristram, hoarsely. "Is she conscious?"

"No. Wait a moment!" And Olga plucks him by the sleeve, yet hesitates, as if there is something she cannot make up her mind to say.

"What is it?" he says, looking into her eyes with a steadfast gaze, though his lips quiver.

"Try and bear it," she whispers, taking his hand, while the tears gather in her eyes. "If—if she lives, we fear she will be disfigured. The horse kicked her in the face."

"Is that all?" he cries, almost joyfully. "Oh, if God is only pleased to spare her to me, I can bear anything else!"

Olga precedes him softly up the stairs, and when she has opened the door and has seen the doctor come towards him, she creeps away again down-stairs into the little parlor, and there she sobs her heart out for pity of the lost beauty of the woman who hated her, as she might have wept if it had been her own sister.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"'Sir,' said he, 'if you had seen the miseries of the world, you would know how to value your present state.'

"'Now,' said the Prince, 'you have given me something to desire; I shall long to see the miseries of the world, since the sight of them is necessary to happiness.'"

Rasselas.

On the June night when Leo urged Raymond to fight against his passion for Mignon, and to go abroad with him, he made his own resolve not to delay his journey longer. Why should he stop to suffer fresh pangs? why should he witness Lord Harley's triumph, when it was breaking his own heart? Almost immediately after parting from Raymond, he ran against another friend: a small, fair, delicate-looking lad he seemed, though as a matter of fact he was two years Leo's senior, and a captain in her Majesty's Foot Guards,—Captain the Honorable Hercules Clyde, better known to his friends and intimates by the name of The Pigmy.

"Halloo, Leo! where are you off to like an avalanche?" is his greeting to Leo, who has nearly run over him. "Please to remember that the parish of St. James's didn't lay down the pavement entirely with a view to your convenience, and that the smallest and humblest of her Majesty's lieges is entitled to a portion of it."

"How are you, Pigmy?" answers Leo, laughing. "I beg your pardon. I didn't see you."

"Really! I flattered myself I was visible to the naked eye, even without my bear-skin. Well, how are you, old fellow, and where do you spring from? 'By the struggling moonbeam's misty light, and the lantern dimly burning.' I should conjecture that the wild excitement of the town doesn't suit your country constitution. You look uncommon seedy."

"Do I?" says Leo. "Oh, I'm all right. The air doesn't feel very fresh and bracing, though, does it?" he adds, expanding his chest and taking in a long breath.

"It suits me," returns the Pigmy, linking his arm in Leo's.

"I don't like it too fresh. Where are you off to? If *she* isn't waiting for you, and you're not late already, I'll make your way mine."

And the two stroll along in friendly talk. Presently Leo brings up the subject of his intended journey.

"No!" cries the Pigmy, stopping dead short in the middle of the pavement, and putting his glass in his eye. "Not really! You don't mean to say you are going to America and round the world! Why, my dear old Leo! I thought if ever a man's soul was in the turnips of his fatherland,—if ever a man had broad and enlightened prejudices against every other country and its inhabitants,—it was the present chip of the old block of Vyner."

"Did you?" laughs Leo. "Perhaps you were right once; but now my soul has begun to soar above turnips, and I am going to travel for the express purpose of getting rid of my prejudices."

"Do you know," says the Pigmy, with solemnity, "that I've been dying to go to America for years? All our fellows who were in Canada have done nothing ever since but rave about America and American women; and I have only been waiting till I could get some fellow big and strong enough to take care of me. Now, you're the one of all others I should have pitched upon; only it never entered my brain to think of your going."

"Come with me," says Leo, heartily. "I shall be only too glad."

"Done!" cries the Pigmy. "And when we've done New York, and Niagara, and Saratoga, we'll go and hunt the grisly bear and the wapiti stag."

"How soon can you start?" asked Leo.

"Not before the first week in August."

"Oh!" says Leo, hesitating; "I wanted to start in a fortnight."

"What are you in such a deuce of a hurry for?" asks the Pigmy. "Have you only just screwed up your courage, and are you afraid of its oozing away if you don't take it whilst it's in the humor."

"I do want most particularly to start at once," says Leo, in a low voice.

"Has *she* thrown you over? Nonsense, Leo! I don't

believe you ever spoke ten words to a woman in your life, and that's the only reason, that and having been caught cheating at cards, that ever makes a man in a violent hurry to fly his country. And, my innocent, I should as soon suspect you of breaking your heart about a woman, as of turning up the king once too often."

"Of course," says Leo, "there is nothing I should like better than to have you for a travelling companion, but——"

"Don't say anything about but. If it would give you so much pleasure, don't think of denying yourself for a moment. You see, my dear Leo, there's Inspection the end of July, and, though I firmly believe it would go off just as well without me, I should never be able to persuade them of it at the Horse Guards. And then you're a free agent, and can quit your country whenever you feel disposed; but I have to ask leave. Come, now, don't be selfish, there's a good fellow. I've set my heart on going with you."

"Let me think about it," answers Leo.

"That's just what I can't!" retorts the Pigmy. "If I parted from you without having nailed you, I should receive a polite and affectionate letter at the Guards' Club to-morrow morning, regretting very much that your plans, etc., etc. No! now or never. Say the word that is to make me the happiest of men" (and the Pigmy, who is as full of tricks and jests as a school-boy, grasps his friend's hand in a pathetic and lover-like way), "or seal my wretchedness forever."

Leo laughs.

"If you don't mind, Pigmy, you'll be locked up before you know where you are. I see No. X 64 looking at you with a lingering eye."

"No, really? Dear Mr. Policeman," says the madcap Pigmy, apostrophizing the grinning guardian of the streets, "think not 'tis wine that makes my heart so glad. I assure you 'tis but joy at meeting a long-lost friend. Now, Leo, come; to be or not to be?"

"We will talk it over to-morrow. When you have had time to reflect, perhaps you may not be so keen about it. Come and breakfast with me, and we'll go over all the pros and cons."

And so they part. Leo gets very little sleep that night. He is desperately unhappy about Olga. From what Lady

Bergholt has said, still more from Kitty's words, he feels that her marriage with Lord Harley is a settled thing, and the sooner he puts himself beyond the power to see or hear of her, the better it will be for him. He would like immensely to have Captain Clyde's company: since their Eton days they have always been great friends, and the Pigmy has such spirits, and is such a thorough good little fellow, and a sportsman to boot, that Leo feels it would be the best thing that could happen to him to get him for a travelling companion. But to spend five or six more weeks in England, with nothing to do but to be restless and wretched,—the sacrifice seems almost too great, even for so desirable a consummation. But at breakfast next morning Captain Clyde is so enthusiastic about the trip, and so urgent in entreating Leo to wait for him, that he consents. But he has had enough of London, and resolves to go home and devote the rest of the time, before starting, to his father. He must see Olga once ere he goes, must take his final leave of her, must hear her soft voice wish him God speed. And so he writes to her,—

"I am going down home to-morrow, and shall probably not be in London again until just before I start for America, the first week in August. You will have left town long before then. May I call and wish you 'Good-by' some time to-day?"

He despatches a commissionnaire with his note, and directions to wait for an answer. It is not long in coming.

"I shall be at home all the afternoon. Come when you like."

After receiving and answering Leo's missive, Olga has a severe struggle with herself. Shall she let him go? She knows she has to say but one word to keep him by her side, and she knows that she loves him. At one moment she thinks she will say the word, will brave the world's wonder and ridicule, will risk her future happiness. But her reason fights against this decision.

"No," it says: "he is but a boy. He has never been in love before. Here is an opportunity of testing whether it is a fleeting passion or a real love that he feels for you. Let him go,—go, thinking you care for Lord Harley and mean to marry him,—go, determined to tear you out of his heart; and then, when he returns in eight or ten months' time, if his

love for you is still unchanged,—then, rash as the venture may be, you will have some excuse for believing in the enduring power of his affection."

Another doubt assails Olga. It says,—

"You have no time to lose. True, you have not yet begun to fade or look old; you have not a gray hair nor a perceptible wrinkle; but a year at your time of life is of very great importance. When he returns, you will be nearly thirty-one, and he five-and-twenty. Somehow, twenty-nine seems so much younger than thirty."

Olga tries hard to be strong, but she is not sure of herself. And it is more than probable that if Leo had spoken to her as he did the previous autumn, if he had pleaded to her in his impassioned young voice and with all the fervor of his heart as he did then, she might have yielded to his prayer, and the Pigmy would have to forego his trip to America,—at all events, in Leo's company. But Fate has its own way of ordering matters, without much reference to the will of beings who are still pleased to consider themselves free agents. In the first place, it ordained that Leo should resolve in his heart to betray no sign of weakness during his farewell interview with the woman he loved. He would not pain her by seeming unhappy! he would make no reference to Lord Harley: he would endeavor to behave in a manly spirit, that he might not cause her pain, nor seem in any way to reproach her for what was no fault of hers, though it had proved the misfortune and misery of his life.

In the second place, Fate ordained that poor Leo should see Lord Harley leaving Mrs. Stratheden's house just as he came within half a dozen doors of it. It happened in this way. Olga had given orders that she was "not at home," and Lord Harley, in common with other callers, received that answer. But he had a message that he particularly wished to give to Mrs. Stratheden, and, being on sufficiently intimate terms at the house, he told the butler he would go into the library and write a note. Thus he, of course, appeared to Leo to have been received by Olga; and the poor lad felt stung to the quick. But he was too loyal to accuse his mistress of having given him intentional pain in letting him run the risk of meeting Lord Harley.

Truscott, who is devoted to Leo, remarks the painful agita-

tion in his face as he ushers him up-stairs, and feels great sympathy for him.

"When the drawing-room bell rings," he says to the footmen, on descending, "you needn't come up. I'll show Mr. Vyner out."

With considerable delicacy of feeling, he augurs that Leo may perhaps not care to be looked at by prying eyes when he comes down again.

The interview is embarrassing to both. Olga, knowing nothing of Lord Harley's call, cannot give an explanation of it to Leo. An explanation, too, at such a critical moment might have been dangerous. At the first sight of his love, alone, too, as he has not seen her for many a long day, Leo is on the verge of forgetting his resolutions; but he makes a strong effort, and is almost cold, almost distant, in manner. He speaks of his intended journey as though the thought were a real pleasure to him rather than pain and grief. He talks himself into a false enthusiasm, which deceives Olga, who is exceedingly sensitive, and prone to doubt her own power. She is disappointed, chilled, and her own manner becomes cooler, more distant. A woman is conscious of her strength, and can use it as long as she has to refuse a man who pleads to her; but when no favor is asked of her, she is almost nettled into offering it.

Olga is more than half tempted to reproach Leo with fickleness and infidelity. It is not long before, mutually embarrassed, mutually disappointed, each wishes the interview at an end.

Leo rises to go: Olga rises too: she does not bid him stay. As he goes towards her to take his long farewell, Leo's strength wanes. There is a mist between him and the face he loves and may never see again: the old feelings surge up in his breast: he longs to take her in his arms for once, to kiss her eyes, her lips, her hair, to entreat her for the last time. But his reverence for her is even stronger than his passion. What if she should be offended, indignant? He dares not risk parting from her in anger: so he takes the little jewelled fingers in his, lays his lips reverently upon them, and with this he goes.

When he is gone, Olga retreats to her room, and is no more seen until dinner. Mrs. Forsyth's quick eyes remark

that her eyelids are swollen and pink, and draws her own conclusions.

As for Leo, as he goes away from the door and down the street, his heart sinks lower at every step, he feels unutterably wretched, the sunshine irks him, the gay bustle of the crowded streets jars upon him, and for the first time in his life he wishes he had never been born.

The days lag wearily. He tries hard to be cheerful in the presence of his father. But Mr. Vyner is dull and out of sorts too: he is miserable about Leo's journey, and yet he feels that it will be almost a relief when he is gone. He cannot but notice how haggard and wretched the boy looks. The poor old squire is more vindictive than ever against Olga: every time he looks at Leo he applies to her mentally some uncomplimentary epithet, coupled with curses deep and broad. He begins to hate all women for her sake: the sight even of his housekeeper, whom he has always regarded with an eye of favor, is displeasing to him. That buxom person has no idea of being under the ban of her master's disfavor without knowing the reason why, and ventures one day to put the question what she has done to displease him.

"Done!" growls the squire. "Nothing in particular. You're a woman: that's enough."

Mrs. Hales looks a little surprised, as well she may.

"You're all full of your cursed tricks and wiles," cries her master, wrathfully. "Why can't you leave us poor devils of men alone?"

"Really, sir!" exclaimes the housekeeper, bridling under the idea that Mr. Vyner intends some personality.

"Pshaw!" he says, with a grim laugh. "I don't mean you. You're a good enough woman in your way. Still, I dare say, if you had the chance, you'd lead some poor fellow the life of the d——d."

Mrs. Hales retires in high dudgeon, and imparts to the butler her belief that the squire has gone off his head.

"Not he!" is the answer. "Don't you see what he is driving at? Why, Mr. Leo is fretting about some lady or other, and it makes the old gentleman quite mad."

"Poor Mr. Leo!" says the housekeeper, sympathizingly. "I'm sure she must be a fine piece of goods if he isn't good enough for her."

"Perhaps there's a hobstacle," suggests the butler. "Perhaps she's got a husband."

"Lor, Mr. Simpson! don't say such a thing!" cries Mrs. Hales, looking shocked; but from that moment she adopts this view of the case, and feels increased sympathy for, and interest in, her young master.

The day of Leo's departure comes at last: the dog-cart is at the door; he has gone round and shaken hands with every one, bidden them "good-by," and received their hearty good wishes; men women, and children are all hidden in corners and looking through loopholes to see the last of him. The squire comes out on the steps to see him off.

"God bless you, my boy! God bless you!" he says, clutching his son's hand in a vice, and speaking in a strangely hoarse, tremulous tone.

"Good-by, my dear old dad," says Leo, in a voice no whit firmer, though he tries to infuse a great deal of cheerfulness into it. "I shall write you yards of letters whenever I get a chance. Good-by! Good-by!"

He is off. The squire stands for a moment until he is out of sight; then he brushes something away from his eyes with the back of his hand, d—ns his favorite dog who gets in his way, makes a rush for his room, and shuts the door with a slam that makes the house shake.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Leo and Captain Clyde are on board the Cunard steamer bound for New York. They left Queenstown yesterday morning, and begin to feel quite at home with their new life. The Pigmy's first excitement is calming down, and he has already embarked in a flirtation with a very pretty girl, one of the passengers.

"I have discovered the name of my idol," he says to Leo, as they take an after-dinner stroll. "She is Miss Maud Marian Hutchins, and she lives in a house with a brown-stone front in Fifth Avenue, New York. Isn't she a screamer?

Not quite so big as I should like: she is only half a head taller than me, and not quite enough developed for my taste; but she is the biggest woman on board,—at all events, the biggest that has shown up yet."

"Why this passion for big women, Pigmy?" asks Leo, laughing.

"Isn't it self-evident?" answers the Pigmy. "Women like either one thing or the other. I'm not a great hulking fellow like you, whom they expect to protect and take care of them: on the contrary, they love to protect and take care of me and pet me. And big women are always so jolly and good-natured (if they're plump, that is); whereas nine out of ten little women are vixens. Maud Marian seems particularly amiable, and has a charming, frank way of giving her opinion, and of asking questions, that is irresistible. I am not quite so sweet on Papa Hutchins: he seems to have the traditional veneration for the almighty dollar and his own country, and tells me that for a young chap who wants to see life and real slap-up-looking girls, N'York's the place. He considers London a very one-horse place as far as amusement is concerned, though he admits it's *the* mercantile city of the world. Here comes my charmer. I'll introduce you, if you promise not to take a mean advantage of your six feet to cut me out."

"No, thanks," answers Leo. "I dare say she'd rather have you all to herself." And he walks away.

The Pigmy proceeds to join Miss Hutchins, who is remarkably handsome, even for an American. She has dark-brown rippling hair, fine eyes, sparkling with fun, a lovely complexion, and pearly teeth, which she shows liberally, though naturally, every time she speaks or laughs, which is by no means unfrequently. Her hands are small, and it is really wonderful how she can tramp up and down in the indefatigable way she does on her tiny, daintily-shod feet. She is eminently unlike her father, who is one of the class his countrymen love to call "Petroleum," and "Shoddy;" and indeed it is through having "struck ile" some ten years ago that Mr. Hutchins has amassed the handsome fortune of which he is now the proud owner. Young ladies have before now applied the same contemptuous epithets to Maud Marian. She overheard them once, and went in much wrath and tribulation to her father. He gave something between a laugh and a snort. "Let 'em

call you what they dam please," he said, consolingly: "there's precious few of 'em you can't take the shine out of; and if your looks ain't enough, why, I can back 'em up with dollars, anyhow!" And Mr. Hutchins slapped his pockets till they emitted a resonance that appeared to give him considerable satisfaction.

"Guess your friend's got a touch of the dismals," observes handsome Maud Marian, as Captain Clyde joins her. She is a little piqued that Leo does not seem to desire her acquaintance. "P'rhaps he's a bit squeamish yet. I noticed he wasn't much up to his meals."

Now, the Pigmy has a mania for practical jokes,—not the practical jokes that endanger life and limb and partake of the nature of horse-play, but he dearly loves to entrap people's credulity by extraordinary stories. As he possesses a wonderful command of countenance, he is not unfrequently successful.

"Ah," he says, gravely, "he has a strange story, poor fellow!"

"Won't you tell it me now?" asks Maud Marian, persuasively. "When I go around, I like to pick up a heap of queer stories to tell when I get back."

"Come and sit down, then," says the Pigmy. "As the immortal Watts remarks, in his beautiful poem,—

> 'Those little feet were never made
> To tramp around all day.'"

"Guess you're pokin' fun at me, Mr. Vyner!" observes Maud Marian, showing her two little rows of pearls.

"Now, if it's not an impertinent question," says the Pigmy, placing a rocking-chair for her, and ensconcing himself in a contiguous one, "how *did* you know that my name was Vyner?"

"Well," responds the young lady, frankly, "I know wan of you is the Honorable Captain *Hercules* Clyde, and I guessed it couldn't be yew."

"Because Hercules was a big fellow?" suggests the Pigmy.

"Jest so," responds Maud Marian, with a merry laugh.

"Well, you see," says the Pigmy, in an explanatory tone, "in our country they christen you whilst you are still in your infancy; and as, unfortunately, it wasn't in the power of my

godfathers and godmother to add a cubit to my stature when I grew up, they didn't know what a very inappropriate thing they were doing in giving me the family name."

"It won't do!" says Maud Marian, shaking her head. "I *know* you're not Captain Clyde."

"How do you know?" asks the Pigmy, putting his glass in his eye, and contemplating with much pleasure the charming face before him.

"Because he's in the Guards," cries the fair one, triumphantly. "Ah! you didn't think I knew that tew when you tried to hoax me. You might be called Hercules and be a little chap, but you couldn't be a little chap and be in the English Guards."

"Allow me to set you right," says the Pigmy, gravely. "Nearly all the officers in the Guards are small: they pick them out on purpose to show off the men."

"No!" exclaims Maud Marian, incredulously.

"Fact, I assure you. There are officers in her Majesty's Brigade of Guards smaller than me."

"Well! you dew astound me, anyhow!" utters Maud Marian. "And you want me to go right away and believe that you're the Honorable Captain Hercules Clyde, of the Guards?"

"My name is certainly Hercules Clyde," replies the Pigmy, imperturbably, "and I have the honor to hold a commission in the Foot Guards."

"And you mean to say that you march around with them great big fellers with the muffs on their heads?"

"I do."

"Well," remarks Miss Huchins, with a certain amount of admiration, "you air a spunky little chap!"

"I'm delighted to have your good opinion," says the Pigmy, with perfect gravity.

"I will say they dew look lovely, the English Guards!" exclaims Maud Marian, with enthusiasm. "Your women are a poor lot, excuse me, sir, and look as if they dressed out of a cast-off-clothes store; but your men are grand. Why, Englishmen and Amer'can women could lick the world between 'em! Why, when I fust came to London and went around, I says, 'Well, where's all this English beauty they make such a fuss about? for I haven't set eyes on it yet, and I've been up and down, up and down, in Hyde Park, tew whole days, and

around Bond Street and Piccadilly.' 'You must go to Ascot,' says some one. So Pa and me we got on the cars, and down we went. Well, there was the Princess of Wales,—she's a reel beauty, but she isn't English at all,—and there was p'r'aps a dozen or so handsome-looking women who perhaps Worth or La Ferrière might have turned out, but the rest were as or'nary-looking a lot as ever I saw, with their clothes pitchforked on, and feet as long and as flat as a dish." And Maud Marian contemplates her own charming little foot with undisguised satisfaction. "Guess you'll see more beauty fust afternoon you walk up Fifth Avenue, than there was collected together at Ascot Cup day. And my! if you want to see women rigged out, you'll see it in N'York, and no mistake."

"Our chief object in visiting America," remarks the Pigmy, gravely, "is to see the beauty of your ladies, the fame of which is very great in London."

"Why, is it now?" exclaims Maud Marian, with that naïve and genuine pleasure Americans always take in hearing anything that belongs to them praised, especially by an English person.

"I confess it is very easy for me to believe all I have heard in that respect," says the Pigmy, looking with deliberate admiration at his fair interlocutor.

Maud Marian gives a merry laugh. She does not attempt to parry the obvious compliment.

"Oh, wal," she says, "I guess I'm not ugly enough to scare crows with; but wait till you've seen some of our reel beauties, and you won't think much to the Venus de Medici after them, anyhow. There's your friend again, looking dismaller than ever, and all this time you haven't told me that story about him."

"Between ourselves," utters the Pigmy, in a low, impressive voice, "he's not quite right here." And he gives a little tap to his forehead.

"Why, isn't he, now?" says Maud Marian, seriously.

"And I," continues the Pigmy, "am taking care of him."

"Yew!" laughs Maud Marian.

"Yes," answers the Pigmy, solemnly. "Brute force is no good. Samson wouldn't have been any use with him. It's moral influence. Now, I possess moral influence to an extraordinary degree. If you look at my eye, Miss Hutchins,

you'll understand in a moment what I mean." And Captain Clyde turns a steady and unfaltering look on Maud Marian, though there is a faint twitch about the corners of his mouth.

"Guess the glass has a lot to do with your mor'l influence," she laughs, merrily. "But now do tell, what *is* the reel Mr. Vyner's story?"

The Pigmy contracts his face till it wears an expression almost of horror, and, putting his lips very close to his listener's ear, he whispers,——

"He's a misogynist."

Maud Marian arches her pretty eyebrows with an expression of awed wonder.

"And what is that, sir?" she asks the Pigmy, perplexed.

"A woman-hater," he says, solemnly.

"Wal," she laughs, merrily," "if he don't get cured o' that complaint our side o' the watter, guess it's taken such a hold of him it's not like to come out at all."

"That's the very reason we are taking this trip," says the Pigmy, with increased seriousness. "He's had all the handsomest Englishwomen at his feet, but he won't look at them. Then some one suggested America."

"Why, now, has he?" remarks Maud Marian, looking at Leo's distant figure with considerable interest. "But why can't he be let alone? If he hates us, guess the loss is his side more'n ours."

"You see," says the Pigmy, "he's the owner of such an enormous property. That's why he can't be allowed to retain his aversion for the sex. If he'd only marry, they would make him a duke at once."

"Is that so?" exclaims the fair one, opening her handsome brown eyes very wide. "But why can't they do it without, if they want to?"

"Oh," answers the pigmy, "in our country they never make an unmarried man a duke, because, you see, it's a very serious business, and it would be no good making a duke for one generation: he must have a son to succeed him."

"Guess it'll make the English gals mad if he dew take back a wife from America," says Miss Hutchins.

"I guess it will," replies the Pigmy, with perfect gravity of countenance.

The following day, Maud Marian, in accordance with a

resolution she has formed during the night, makes a pretext for entering into conversation with Leo. It is not long before that acute young lady discovers that she has been made the victim of a hoax. She forbears, however, to tax the Pigmy with his iniquity, but, determined not to be "bested by a Britisher," she tells him one or two most astonishing yarns about her own country, which he accepts in perfect good faith, being prepared for anything, however extraordinary, on the other side of the Atlantic. Like most English people on their first visit to America, the only thing he positively cannot believe is that there is a singular resemblance between the manners and customs of the well-bred of both countries.

She is not long in discovering Leo's real ailment, and comes to the conclusion that it is useless to waste her time and blandishments on him. He is very pleasant and courteous, smiles at her naïve sayings, and never avoids her, but, with the instinct of her sex, she knows that the citadel has been already taken, and is impregnable to assault.

"Strikes me," she remarks one day to Captain Clyde, "the complaint your friend's sufferin' from is liking one of our sex too much instead of too little."

"No!" says the Pigmy, putting his glass in his eye and looking interested. "What makes you think that?"

"Guess you know all about it," she answers, giving him an inquisitorial look.

"No, upon my honor! I never thought poor old Leo knew one woman from another."

"Is that so? Then I reckon you've been goin' around with your eyes in the back of your head. He knows one so much, he don't care to know nothing of all the rest. And I s'pose she don't see it in the same light, for he's that onhappy, I know sometimes he wishes himself in kingdom come. Why, hevn't you heard him sigh, and hevn't you seen that dull miserable look come over him?"

"Yes: but, to tell you the truth, I put the former down to indigestion, and the latter to ennui. You know we are always supposed to take our pleasures sadly. Here, Leo!" he cries, as the subject of their discussion comes within hail; "what do you think Miss Hutchins says about you?"

Maud Marian does not attempt to stop him: she wants confirmation of her opinion.

"I cannot tell, I am sure," answers Leo, in his pleasant voice. "Nothing unkind, I will answer for it."

"She says," pursues the Pigmy, deliberately, taking a critical survey of his friend's face, whilst Maud Marian does the same,—"she says, my guileless and misunderstood Pylades, that you are so desperately in love with some unknown fair one that the rest of the sex have no charms in your eyes."

The crimson mounts to Leo's throat and temples: he is utterly unprepared for this attack, and is furious to find himself blushing like a school-girl.

The Pigmy, with ready tact, comes to his rescue.

"See!" he says, turning to his fair companion, "his blushes attest his innocence. The bare thought is too much for his modesty. I knew you were mistaken."

But in his secret heart the Pigmy is convinced that Maud Marian's surmise was correct, and burns to ask, "Who is she?"

Poor Leo! he tries hard to be brave, but he is passing through a fiery ordeal. Again and again he tells himself that all is over between him and Olga,—that he has to begin life afresh,—that it is weak, unmanly, wrong, to go on loving her so idolatrously now he knows that she can never be his,—nay, that she will be another's; for on this point Leo has not the faintest doubt. Raymond had written him just before he left England, "It is as well perhaps that you are going out of the country, for I hear it is settled that Olga is to be Lady Harley. When you come back, perhaps you will be more charitably disposed towards me than that night when you gave me such a tremendous wigging for coveting my neighbor's wife."

Of course Leo could not know that Raymond only spoke from a bare rumor, to suit his own purpose, and had not seen Olga since her return to Blankshire. The monotony of the sea-voyage wearied him intensely. To the great delight of the majority of passengers, the sea was perfectly calm: he would have liked it to be rough and turbulent, in consonance with his own feelings, for contending outward forces give relief to those struggling inner ones.

"How tame the sea looks!" he remarks to Miss Hutchins, as they stand looking down at it together. "It is dreadfully disappointing to wake up and find it just the same day after day."

"Calc'late you're about the only person as finds it disappoint-

ing," returns Maud Marian, dryly. "The ocean swell's a gent whose acquaintance I've no desire on airth to make. I've never wance missed a meal this journey; and that's more to me than all the grandeur of the waves and 'that sort of thing, you know,'" (mimicking the Pigmy).

Leo is immensely relieved when they reach New York. For the first time he is conscious of a pleasurable excitement which the novelty of everything about him inspires: there is a brisk go-aheadness about everybody that makes a striking contrast to the stolidity and comparative impassiveness of his own countrymen.

"Au revoir!" says Maud Marian to the Pigmy. "Guess you'll be ashore fust, anyhow: we'll have an almighty lot of traps to pay deuty on. Guess you'll have to look a bit spryer here than you dew in the old country: you won't have time for all your fine dandified Guards' airs in N'York."

And she throws him a merry smile over her shoulder as he joins the *queue*.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A PACKET OF LETTERS.

From Leo to Mr. Vyner.

SOREL, CANADA, Sept. —, 187—.

"MY DEAREST FATHER,—

"We have been so constantly on the move that I have really had no opportunity of writing you more than just a line or two at a time. I think I told you how we went from New York up the Hudson in a gigantic steamer, a 'floating hotel' as they call it, and I must confess that Americans very far surpass us in the luxury and comfort with which they travel. Of course there are drawbacks, and one has to overcome one's class prejudices, or, at all events, keep them in one's pocket out of sight, and to bear as best one may the sights and sounds that the national throat unceasingly sends forth: still, there is an immense deal both to admire and wonder at. I can't help

being amused at the naïve pride of the American in his country, and the way in which he expects you to be struck all of a heap at everything you see. I suppose they know by our looks that we come straight from the British Isles, and so they interview us considerably, and if we don't fall into raptures over everything I can see they ascribe it to sheer envy and jealousy. One man guessed I should find England a very one-hoss place after Amer'ka; he'd been there once and found it 'nation dull; and as for our railway travelling, it was a disgrace to a civilized nation; it was an incentive to murder and crime and every atrocity; but of course if an Englishman considered himself such an almighty sight better than other folk, he must incur those risks; for his own part, he felt he was a man and a brother, and he didn't care who he sat alongside of, as long as it wasn't a darned nigger. We saw a good deal of beauty and fashion at West Point. The American women are remarkably handsome, and wonderful dressers. As for Pigmy, I did not know how to get him away: he fell in love with a fresh beauty every day, and they all seemed to take to him amazingly. I am not surprised, for their men are by no means equal to themselves in manner or attractiveness. We went afterwards to Newport and Saratoga, and saw more beauty and more dress, and the Pigmy fell deeper in love than ever. Keen as he is about sport, it was with the utmost difficulty I could get him off and bring him here. We went first to Quebec, and on the journey met a man who offered us some fishing on the Jacques Cartier river. I must say the kindness and civility we have met with has been something wonderful. The Pigmy had lots of letters of introduction, but has hardly presented any: there has been no occasion. Here a man enters into conversation with you in a train, or on a steamboat, and, after an half an hour's acquaintance, offers you all sorts of hospitality. I fancy two American strangers travelling in England would have to wait a long time before they were offered shooting, fishing, and free quarters by any of our countrymen. We had splendid fishing, pulled out salmon as fast as we could throw a line, but the flies and mosquitoes are something too fearful. We have tried everything,—have smeared our faces with beastly smelling oil, and, as a last resource, the Pigmy has tied up his head in a muslin bag, and looks like a peach on the south wall. Then we went to the Falls of Montmorency, which are very fine:

there we got some capital trout, but were still persecuted by flies. Then we took steamer to Sorel. We live in a hut with a native Canadian, and are having excellent shooting,—any quantity of snipe and duck; but the mosquitoes completely prevent one's enjoying anything. Next week we go up the St. Lawrence to Montreal, then to Niagara, and thence to Chicago, where I hope to find a letter from you. Tell me what sort of sport you are having, and how you amuse yourself. I hope to hear you are having what they call here 'a good time,' and that you don't miss me a bit. Kindest remembrances to everybody. "Ever my dearest father,

"Your affectionate son,

"LEO."

From Mr. Vyner to Leo.

"THYRSTAN HALL, Oct. —, 187—.

"MY DEAR LEO,—

"I need not tell you how glad I am to get your letters. I am half disposed to envy you your sport, though the flies, as you describe them, must be plaguy troublesome. Being in English dominion, and catching salmon and trout, makes me feel, although there's so much water between us, as if you were still in civilized parts. I only wish you'd make up your mind to stop there, and give up Mexico and the San Francisco journey. By all accounts, you are having capital sport; and what more can you want? What's the use of running into danger? I read in a paper the other day that some of those infernal Indians had caught two white men and tortured and scalped them. However, if it pleases the Almighty to let you make a fool of yourself and lose your life without doing any good by it, I've no more to say. Please God you may come back; and, if you do, I hope and trust you'll come back the man you used to be some fifteen months ago. Make up your mind that things are best as they are, as *I am quite sure* they are, and that if you had had your own way you'd be wishing to heaven by this time you hadn't. Talking of that, a letter came for you yesterday, in a female hand, bearing the Blankshire postmark: so I suppose that Jezebel of a woman can't let you alone. I was glad, however, to see, by her sending it here, that you were not corresponding with her; and if you take my advice you'll throw it into the fire unopened. I had

a good mind to do it myself: however, I hate anything that isn't fair play, and I don't suppose a straightforward man like myself is any match for this middle-aged flame of yours,—*bless* her. You know what I mean. There, there! I'm only writing myself into a rage, and I don't want to hurt your feelings. So take the cursed thing and blubber over it, and kiss it, and ——however, there's an end of it. Hartopp and Everett have been with me: we got fifty brace on the 1st, thirty the 2d, and twenty-five the 3d, besides any quantity of ground game and a few partridges. The latter are very wild. The bag for the three days was four hundred head,—quite enough, to my thinking, for a sportsman. I hate your *battues*. I asked that snob Jameson, very much against the grain, because he was civil to you; but he gave me to understand my shooting wasn't good enough for him. He asked me to a big day next week,—expects at least a thousand head; but I told him that if my shooting was too little for him, his was too much for me. I need not say I miss you; but I'm getting on very well, considering, and have actually promised to pay three visits next month,—wonderful for me. Hales is very anxious in her inquiries after you. Whenever the post brings a letter from you, she comes and fusses about and pretends to dust the things: so yesterday I had to ask her whether she'd leave me in peace to read your letter, or whether she'd like to have it first. She bounced out of the room: so, thank goodness, I got rid of her. Hang me if I don't think the old fool's in love with you: you seem irresistible in the eyes of middle-aged females. Well, I've got to the end of my paper, and, as you know, I'm not much of a hand at letter-writing. Let me hear from you as often as you can manage it, and believe me, my dear Leo,

"Your affectionate father,

"Ralph Vyner.

"P.S.—Don't be annoyed at anything in my letter. I must have my say, you know, and I can't re-write."

This is Mr. Vyner's letter, and the priceless document he encloses runs as follows:

"The Manor House, Oct.—, 187—.

"My dear Leo,—

"Nearly three months since I saw you, and all this time not a line. Are you angry with me, or have you forgotten

me? Don't you know what an interest I take in all your plans and movements, how heartily I sympathize with your ideas, and how much I expect of and for your future? Indeed, it is not kind of you to keep this long silence. I am only just going to write you a little note, that I may have a four-fold return, for I cannot think of any news to tell you that you would care to hear. All the horses and dogs that you used to take an interest in are in a flourishing state. Truscott asked after you the other day, and when I told him of your proposed journey round the world he looked blank and said he *hoped* you would come back, but his tone intimated that he thought it more than doubtful, and I know in his own mind he expects you will share the fate of Captain Cook. Joking apart, my dear Leo, I hope you will take care of yourself and not run into needless danger: there are other people, remember, besides your father who cannot afford to lose you. There is very little Blankshire news to tell. Ma chère and I have entertained the county and been entertained in return. Our lovely neighbor Lady Bergholt is at the Court and immensely admired. She has had a twin brother staying with her, a charming young fellow, almost too pretty for a man, but not at all effeminate in his ways and manners. I do not see very much of Raymond: his poor mother is as great an invalid as ever.

"Ma chère and I have some thought of wintering in Rome; life is rather a difficult problem for two desolate women with no ties and no particular vocation: still, it is only talk at present. And when we have yawned ourselves through the winter, there is only the same routine of the London season to go through again, which I confess is beginning to pall upon me. I am half minded to go round the world myself,—only I am rather helpless, and fond of comfort, and, when I have been away from England two months, invariably get home-sick. I must send this letter to Thyrstan to be forwarded, for, through your unkind neglect of me, I have not the least idea where to address this. Ma chère unites with me in very kindest regards, and believe me, dear Leo,

"Always most sincerely yours,

"Olga Stratheden.

"Tell me what you think of American women. I have met some very handsome ones in Paris."

Captain Clyde to Mr. Vyner.

"Chapieau's Hotel, Denver, Oct. —, 187—.

"Dear Mr. Vyner,—

"Don't be alarmed at seeing my cabalistic signs instead of Leo's manly hand: he is all right, but strained his wrist giving the most richly-deserved punishment I ever saw to a brute who was maltreating a mule, and so can't hold a pen at present with his usual ease and elegance. Our gentleman whipped out his revolver, but we are pretty handy with those playthings by now, and as there were two of us, and we were both ready for him, he put it away again, after treating us to a little language that would have made every separate hair of a bargee's head stand on end. I have been practising shooting through my trousers-pocket, which is a handy thing to be able to do in this part of the world, and, though a destructive amusement, it may be useful, and one has generally to pay for a new accomplishment.

"We had tremendous luck last week, and both got a wapiti on Laramie Plains. We were so delighted that I think we shed tears of joy. There seems some doubt about our coming across a 'grisly,' but we are promised any quantity of black bears; indeed, I think of writing home and offering to undertake the contract for our men's bearskins for next year, only it might be a little premature. Did Leo tell you about our buffalo-hunt at Fort Hayes? One of the party had a shocking bit of luck. His horse was galloping bravely along by the side of the infuriated buffalo; he fired; down went his horse, and shot my friend half a mile off. We were very much astonished when he got up and his horse did not: in the excitement he had actually shot the poor brute dead. We are told this not unfrequently happens. Thank heaven, Leo and I each got our bull instead of our friend's cattle; but, I must say, buffalo-hunting is an overrated amusement. So far our travels have been a tremendous success. I have enjoyed myself immensely, and Leo is getting back to his old cheery form. I have a safe, comfortable feeling in going about with him, and his handsome proportions seem to inspire a certain amount of respect.

"We haven't come across any Indians at present, though we were treated to some cheerful and inspiriting stories about

them at the fort. We only found a small party there, as most of the officers and men were out scouting, which, being interpreted means looking after Indians. It seems that some little time ago the officers gave some ladies a picnic in Paradise Valley, and unintentionally took them a good deal nearer those blessed regions than they had any intention of. About the middle of the day the men shouldered their rifles and went in pursuit of something upon which to gratify the destructive instincts of the sex, whilst the amiable fair ones occupied themselves in preparing a repast. (I wonder how that sort of picnic would be appreciated by our own charming countrywomen!) The bold hunters had not got very far, when they had the agreeable excitement of beholding in the distance a hundred or so Indians, attended by their fighting squaws. With stealthy haste, our friends crept back to the trees where they had left their own (non-fighting) squaws, and, without waiting for explanation, or dinner, or anything else, they carried off the wondering fair, and 'I can tell yew, sir,' said our gallant historian, 'we went on our marrow-bones and thanked the Almighty when we got 'em safe inside the fort.'

"However, the line of country we are going, we don't expect to meet any of the copper-colored gentry, and, as we travel never less than a party of five or six, they are not likely to molest us.

"I envy Leo his long tour. I, hapless victim to my patriotism, have to be home the middle of December. What a lion I shall be when I get back!—what yarns I shall spin!—one can always do that better without one's travelling companions. I have been getting up all the stories of great exploits done out here, and I can assure you some of them are calculated to make people ask, 'How is that for high?' (an expression much in vogue here), and I intend to make myself the hero of them all. Leo's best love,—he will write in a day or two,—and believe me

"Yours very truly,

"HERCULES CLYDE.

"Really and truly, Leo's hurt is not worth mentioning. He makes me add this P.S. lest you should be uneasy."

Leo to Mr. Vyner.

"Santa Fé, Oct. —, 187—.

"My dearest Father,—

"Our travelling has been so rough and continuous lately that I could not very well write, and in these parts the post goes but seldom, and is, I am afraid, not very much to be relied on. I was awfully glad to get your letter at Taos: home news in these wild parts is more welcome than I can tell you. About a fortnight ago we left Manitou for Pueblo (a distance of forty-five miles), in a light wagon drawn by two mules hired with a driver at Denver. The road was good, though the country looked like a desert, and you would be surprised how the cattle seem to thrive on the coarse herbage. We passed several teams, driven by Mexicans (as villanous-looking a lot as I ever came across). We reached Pueblo in the afternoon, and had a very fair dinner of antelope, copiously garnished with Mexican onions. Next day we crossed the Arkansas, and drove to D——'s farm, the finest in that part of the country. The house is only one story high, situated in the midst of eight hundred acres of Indian corn and wheat. Most of the land is artificially irrigated,—a system, I think, which might be adopted with advantage in many parts of England. They gave us a warm welcome, and entertained us sumptuously on young bear, corn, onions, beet-root, and milk. After dinner we walked up a beautiful cañon alongside a stream, across which we counted lots of beaver-dams. Our old enemies the mosquitoes are as bad as ever.

"Next day we went up the mountains to shoot. Pigmy got a bear, which he threatens to take home and have made into a bearskin for his own head, and I got a stag and a fawn. The heat was intense, and we suffered tortures from thirst. Poor Pigmy had frightful pains in his chest, caused by the rarity of the air; but he is tremendously plucky, and never complains. We continued to ascend the Rocky Mountains, and eventually got to the top by the Sangre de Cristo pass. Then we gradually descended to Fort Garland, and on our way stopped to catch a few trout, and Pigmy bagged ten teal. The officers at the fort were very civil, and put us up, and the commandant gave us a capital dinner. Of course we heard lots of stories about Indians; but I don't think we have

anything to fear. We go about well armed, in case of accidents.

"Next morning, after breakfast, we drove seventeen miles along a very good road to San Luis, a wonderful place for wild fowl in the winter. We got a good bag of duck and teal. Here we were told it was the proper thing to give a ball or fandango to the natives in their assembly rooms: every Mexican village has a place set apart for dancing. About a hundred accepted our invitation; and I can't say we were very proud of our guests when they arrived.

"The men were beastly dirty and disreputable, and the women only a shade better; only two or three were good-looking. You should have seen Pigmy doing the polite, and endeavoring to make himself understood and to hold his nose at the same time. Some mammas of thirteen brought their babies. There was only one kind of dance, as far as I could see, which appeared to partake of the nature of a religious ceremony, so solemnly was it conducted, and in perfect silence. We had drink going all the evening, and supper at eleven. Pigmy led in the prettiest girl, but she was very shy, and we heard afterwards that it is not the thing for a Mexican young lady to converse freely with the other sex. After supper we distributed cigarettes and sweetmeats, which the ladies thoroughly appreciated, and soon after that the company dispersed, and we had the satisfaction of hearing that our fandango had been quite a success. Do you know, my dear old dad, I can't help thinking it must be a good thing for one to see phases of life utterly different from what one has seen or imagined before? though I must confess that nearly everything I have seen at present has only tended to make me believe more firmly in dear old England. I am as thorough a Britisher as ever.

"We left next morning at ten, and drove through a good grazing country well supplied with water. On our way to Costilla we got thirteen teal. This is a regular Mexican town: all the houses are adobe, and only one story high, with flat roofs on which the natives sun themselves and smoke their cigarettes. Outside the houses, in sweet confusion, you see children, pigs, sheep, goats, poultry, and dogs of all sizes and colors wandering about. I hate the Mexicans: they are, I should imagine, the cruellest and laziest wretches on the face

of the earth. We killed quantities of duck, rabbits, and jack rabbits, and I caught some big trout in the Rio Grande with a red spoon bait: they wouldn't look at anything else. I got a wolf, and Pigmy a couple of antelope. Almost every other day is a saint's day or holiday with these lazy brutes. One day it had poured in torrents, and on my return to the town I met a procession with crosses, crucifixes, and flags. In the centre was a box carried by two men, like a sedan-chair, containing an image of Christ. This had been hired from the priest for the day for twenty-five dollars, and was carried about the streets, accompanied by ringing of bells and firing old guns, in order to stop the rain. When the natives cannot afford so long a price, they hire one of the Virgin for eight dollars.

"From Costilla we went on fifty miles to Taos, where I got your letter and Pigmy found a budget from his people. Taos is one of the oldest towns in New Mexico. We visited the village of the Pueblo Indians: they have a 'reservation' in a beautiful valley on a stream between two mountains. These Indians are at peace now with the whites, and are capital farmers. They own large herds of cattle, sheep, goats, and excellent ponies. The village consists of two very large adobe buildings from four to five stories high, one on each side of the stream. There are no doors on the ground-floor, but you ascend from the ground to the top of the first story by a ladder, and so on to the top. To get inside you descend a ladder through a hole on the flat roof into a room, and so on down to the ground-floor. The rooms are small. The inmates squat about on buffalo robes, eat wild plums, and smoke cigarettes. Bows and arrows, with which they kill game, hang on the walls, with knives and rusty fire-arms. The old chief was very civil, particularly after we had given him whiskey. The men wear their hair long, and the squaws short, rather reversing the order of things. They profess to be Roman Catholics; but we heard on very good authority that they practise snake-worship in private in egg-shaped rooms under ground. No stranger is admitted or allowed to know where these subterranean temples are. Rattlesnakes are caught and kept as divinities.

"We came from Taos here. The roads were dreadful, through a wretched country, with wretched-looking people.

The women cover their faces with an old shawl. We were thankful when we arrived at the Exchange Hotel, from which I am now writing. It is most indifferent, but better than we have been accustomed to lately.

"I hope I haven't bored you with this tremendous epistle, which I am afraid reads rather like a chapter out of a very dry book of travels. I can't tell you how I look forward to your letters, and how more than ever dear home and England seem to me at this distance. My kindest remembrances to every man, woman, child, horse, and dog at Thyrstan, and with my most affectionate love to yourself, always, my dear father,

"Your devoted son,

"LEO."

Raymond L'Estrange to Leo Vyner.

"L'ESTRANGE HALL, Nov. —, 187—.

"MY DEAR LEO,—

"When you receive this, I shall be on my way to join you. I want to get away from this hateful place so far that I cannot even hear of it. A most awful thing has happened: I can't write about it; the very thought gives me the horrors. Suffice it to say, Lady Bergholt has met with a most appalling accident: no one knows yet if she will live; in any case she must be disfigured for life. I was there when it happened, and I would not go through it again for anything that mortal man could offer me. I only wonder I have kept my reason. As it is, my head feels very bad, and my nerves are all to pieces. So I am going to start on your track with all the speed I can, after I get back from Paris, where I go to-night to try and get rid of the horrors. Let me know at the Brevoort House, as soon as you possibly can, where and how to join you. I don't mind any amount of hardship: I only want to get away from this accursed place. Would to God I had gone with you, as you wanted me!

"Yours,

"RAYMOND."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"Let us rise up and part; she will not know,
Let us go seaward as the great winds go,
Full of blown sand and foam: what help is here?
There is no help, for all these things are so,
And all the world is bitter as a tear.
And how these things are, though ye strove to show,
She would not know."

A Leave-Taking.

Poor Mignon! Mignon, who but so short a time ago was among the fairest of women,—on whom no eye could rest without acknowledging, however grudgingly, her wondrous beauty. And in a moment this exquisite work of nature was changed into a loathly and horrid thing, from which men would turn and shrink. The gift in which she has triumphed is further from her than from many a woman born unlovely, ungracious: at least, men do not turn shuddering from them. It is a royal gift, beauty, and Mignon, like many another richly dowered godchild of nature, had worn it with exultant pride, such pride as a man may feel upon whose breast gleams the order that his sovereign's hand has placed there. She made no boast of it, but it was as much a matter of course with her to admit its possession, as for the man on whom the proud insignia shines. For the poor, the plain, the insignificant, she had a kind of contemptuous pity: she was to them what a delicately fashioned, exquisitely painted vase is to a common delft mug. All the extravagant, selfish claims she has made on others have been made on the sheer, sole strength of her loveliness: her feeling has always been, "I am beautiful, and you must worship me, must give up to me." She has been so keenly conscious of her own individuality as to be unable thoroughly to enter into, or even recognize, the individuality of others. Intensely alive to all that hurt or disturbed herself, she has been almost indifferent to the pain she has given others. She has not been sympathetic, nor gifted with fine feelings. She has not known the pain that a tender heart can feel for the woes of others, still less its gladness for others' joy.

And now, what will she do? She is like a Sybarite suddenly made destitute; she is like a mariner shipwrecked on a barren rock; she is like one robbed of a love that was more than life. How will she—how can she bear it? but God is merciful; He "tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," as Sterne (not David, nor Solomon, nor Job, as people will have it) says. Mignon remains profoundly unconscious of the awful fate that has overtaken her. Even as the days and weeks go on, as the ghastly wounds close into long seams, she knows nothing of her woe. Her soul is away on a far journey: they cannot tell if it will ever return. The poor body writhes and turns and moans sometimes as if it suffered: sometimes it is quiet and still: if the eyes unclose, there is no meaning nor recognition in them.

"It is better so," says Olga to the heart-stricken husband, with tears of sympathy in her kind brown eyes. "If we can only keep her from knowing what has happened until——"

But her voice dies away, for she knows that exquisite beauty has fled forever. Olga is looking pale and worn: she has passed through a terrible ordeal. With her intense sensitiveness, her highly-strung nerves, the days she has spent in this terrible sick-room have been fraught with real suffering to her; but she has never thought of herself, never spared herself: if Mignon had been her own sister she could have done no more. And there had been the harder task still of soothing the heart-broken husband, of trying to pour consolation that was not unreal nor stereotyped into his despairing heart, of choosing the time to speak and the time to forbear, which requires the finest tact of all. A professional nurse had been sent for at once; but, invaluable and untiring as these devoted women are, a sick-chamber is sad indeed where the head nurse is not one who gives her services for love's sake, one who has that refined intuition of the patient's wants that no gold can buy. And this was Olga's task. Lady Bergholt could not be moved for some time from the shabby little roadside inn, but Olga had gradually transformed the poor mean room into something unlike itself. Every comfort was at hand. Her own kitchen-maid came daily to prepare what the invalid was able to take. Frequently, when the poor sufferer was restless, Olga remained by her bedside all night.

And Sir Tristram,—how fared it with him? He had

bought this gem with all that he had, and now, after these thirteen little months' possession, months that have lacked much of the pride and glory he had looked for, his prize is flung at his feet, flawed, ruined, worthless. No man will covet it of him henceforth forever; no envious murmurs, no loud-whispered admiration, will fall on his ears as she hangs on his proud arm. Does he feel chafed and angry, as a man might who had made a bargain and finds himself defrauded?—does he feel a wish to be quit of this fearful burden, such as Raymond had felt that day of horror when he kept his ghastly vigil? No! God wot! Every selfish feeling that a passion less noble might dictate is swallowed up in his great love of her, in his great anguish for her sake. She is no less dear to him because the poor mouth, that was so lovely in its rippling child-like laughter, is torn and distorted, and the little teeth, that gleamed like pearls, broken or missing,—because the cream-white skin is rent and gashed, and the tiny ear almost torn away;—nay, rather more dear. Because love, true love, has its best joy in giving; because heretofore, in the plenitude of her youth and beauty, she wanted nothing of him, and now she will want everything,—all his tenderness, all his care, all his watchfulness to shield her from pain, the pain of feeling herself pitied and neglected,—all that he can lavish upon her to atone, if may be, in a little measure for all she has lost.

As he sits watching her day and night all his heart goes out in love and pity to her, and his thoughts turn ever upon how he shall lighten the load that he shudderingly knows will be so awful for her to bear. At first he has been so glad of her unconsciousness, has ardently desired that she shall not know of her terrible calamity until Time has softened the worst of the disfigurement; but now he begins to long passionately for her eyes to open in recognition of him: his heart and voice thirst to tell her that she is dearer to him than in the fairest days of her beauty. But it is not to be. The lagging hours crawl by,—days when the sun shines out cheerily, and tries by a sudden warmth to make believe he is not so very far off; days when the earth is bound in the iron grip of frost and ice, and there are no scarlet-coated riders to make Sir Tristram's heart still heavier within him.

At last it is decreed that Lady Bergholt may be moved, and she is carried back through the gates of her park, whence

she issued last so lovely and wilful. Oh, if we knew what life had in store for us, how could any of us bear to live! Blest ignorance of the future, more blest even than the waters of Lethe, of which Time gives our souls to drink!

Mary Carlyle has been summoned from Italy. She is at Bergholt, and has heart-brokenly taken up her post as nurse. Yet Olga is often here: at first scarcely a day passes that she does not come to see how it fares with this broken flower whom she has nursed so tenderly. And between her and Mary there springs up a warm regard. Mignon can no longer be said to be unconscious, but she is possessed by a dull, unalterable apathy. Nothing can rouse her: she eats and sleeps, and even walks, but only as though she were an automaton: no ray of intelligence lights up her blue eyes or kindles a smile in her pale cheeks. The wounds have healed up wonderfully: though it is impossible she can ever be beautiful again, it is hoped that Time and mechanical art may soften the distortion that now disfigures her. One side of her face is as lovely as ever, perfectly unscathed, but the other is drawn up at the mouth and down at the eye, and deeply seamed across the cheek to where the iron nearly cleft the ear in two. As the months go by, they try to rouse her: they speak of things that used to interest her keenly in bygone days; they even talk of her accident in her hearing: all in vain. At last they bring Gerry to see her,—Gerry, who, for his own sake, has been kept away till now. They have prepared him to see the change in his lovely sister, and the poor lad has primed himself bravely to go through the ordeal, but his heart beats and his knees knock together as he puts his hand on the door. He goes falteringly towards her, sits on the sofa beside her, with the still beautiful side towards him, throws his arms around her, crying,—

"Oh, my darling Yonnie! don't you know me?"

For the first time a faint ray of light comes into her dull eyes, and she mutters inarticulately, "Gerry!" and subsides again into her apathy.

It is too much for the poor lad, the sight of the piteous, disfigured face, the vacant indifference, and he rushes from the room, breaking into great choking sobs the while he goes. Sir Tristram, who has been waiting outside, takes him tenderly by the arm and leads him away, and Gerry buries his face in his hands and cries like a woman.

When the doctor pays his daily visit, he augurs very favorably from his patient's momentary recognition of her brother. "It is a beginning," he says, cheerfully, and Sir Tristram feels happier than he has done since the accident. Poor Gerry is so grieved and distressed, they think it better to urge him to leave Bergholt, and the poor lad goes away with the heaviest heart he has ever carried in his life. Mignon takes no notice of him when he bids her good-by. Sir Tristram has been nourishing a painful idea in his breast. One day he plucks up courage to impart it to Mary. But, as he speaks, the color deepens in his face, and he looks away from her.

"I want you," he says, in a low voice, "to mention Raymond's name before her: it might waken some memory in her brain."

And Mary, without any comment, any gesture of surprise or disapprobation, complies.

"Raymond has gone abroad," she says, taking her sister gently by the hand. Twice she repeats the words, but no faintest ray of intelligence lights up the clouded blue eyes. When Mary confides the ill success of the experiment to Sir Tristram, he knows not whether to be grieved or glad: he is willing to pay almost any price to bring back her wandering soul. Before setting out on his journey, Raymond wrote the following letter to the husband whom he no longer desired to wrong:

"DEAR SIR TRISTRAM,—

"I have hardly courage to address you, knowing, as I do, that the very thought of me can only bring pain and abhorrence to your mind. In justice to myself I wish to tell you that it was *not* through any persuasion of mine that Lady Bergholt followed the hounds on the day of the accident, although I was aware of her intention. I hardly know how to say what is in my mind. I implore your forgiveness for any pain I may have caused you in days gone by through my imprudent admiration for Lady Bergholt, and I wish to add, uncalled for though it may seem at the present moment, that there was nothing in our intercourse that need have caused you uneasiness. Lady Bergholt was quite indifferent to me, and only amused herself at my expense."

It is with pleasure Raymond pens these lines, that would

have humiliated him so bitterly a few days since: he cherishes the idea eagerly that the life which it was once his ardent desire to make one with his, has no claim upon him; he realizes now with some faint sense of shame that it was not the woman's self that had roused his passion, but her loveliness. The passion is gone, only a shrinking pity remains, a desire to put the wide seas between him and her whom he had sworn in his madness he could not live without.

The letter gave a certain degree of comfort to Sir Tristram. He believed it; though now if the most damning evidence had been brought to him of his wife's guilt, it would not have lessened by one whit his tenderness and care for her in her sore need. He did not answer it,—no answer was required,—but he felt less bitter in his heart against Raymond than he had done before.

In his thoughtful care, Sir Tristram has caused every mirror to be removed from Mignon's bedroom and boudoir; he wanted to conceal from her as long as possible the loss of her beauty; but alas! there was no need for all these precautions: beauty and ugliness are all alike to those poor vacant eyes. But after Gerry's visit the soul seems faintly to stir at times in its prison: now and again, although she keeps utter silence, a faint light dawns in her face, and some object in the room will seem to fix her attention. At these times her husband will come and sit beside her, holding her hand, and lavishing endearing words upon her. But they return to him barren as though he poured his tenderness out to a statue or to some dead woman.

For two or three days, Mary has remarked an increasing intelligence in Mignon's eyes, but to all attempts to attract or direct her attention she has remained impassive. Her eyes wander round the walls of the room; occasionally she puts her hand to her head. One day, to Mary's surprise, she rises unassisted from the sofa, and makes for the door.

"What is it, my darling?" cries Mary, springing up. "What can I do for you?"

But Mignon continues in silence to grope her way like a blind person to the door. Her sister opens it, and she goes out and towards the staircase. She does not resist Mary, who holds her by the arm; but she goes slowly down the stairs to the drawing-room. Arrived there, she makes straight for the

large pier-glass, and stops resolutely in front of it. Just one flash of intelligence in her eyes, one movement of her hand to her scarred face, and then the old vacuous expression returns: she suffers herself to be led to a chair, and for that day takes no more notice of anything. When the doctor is told of this, he advises them to put looking-glasses in her room, and not to check her if she wishes to look at her reflection in them.

"It may do more than anything to bring back her senses," he says. And they obey him. For a day or two, Mignon does not seem to remark the replaced mirrors; then she suddenly takes her place in front of one, and stares at it until some one gently leads her away.

The sight does not appear to produce any effect upon her, though she invariably puts her fingers up and down the scarred side of her cheek, and touches her mouth where the teeth are gone. The next day, when Olga is there, she goes to the glass and mutters some word inarticulately. Olga strains her ears to catch the sound. Again Mignon mutters. Olga fancies the word is Raymond.

"Did you say Raymond, dear?" she asks, softly, taking her hand.

Again Mignon says, more distinctly this time,—

"Raymond!"

But they can elicit nothing further from her, and presently she seems to lose the idea, and subsides into her usual vacancy. Each day after this her intelligence takes a step towards returning, and it is evident to those who watch her that her mind is dimly trying to grasp some thought or memory. That it is connected with the change in her appearance is also a certainty, for she constantly surveys herself in the glass, and every day the trouble in her face deepens. One afternoon, Sir Tristram comes as usual to visit her. Mary has gone for her accustomed stroll in the grounds, and husband and wife are alone together. One might think there was scant comfort or pleasure for Sir Tristram in having Mignon all to himself, but it does please him, since, in spite of her dumbness and her shattered beauty, he loves her no less tenderly than when he was her lover, and, as he holds her passive hand in his, his thoughts look ever towards a future when it shall be permitted him to build up a new life for her, and a happiness that shall not depend upon the caprice of men's admiration. He feels, as he has never

felt before, that she is his, his entirely, utterly: the superiority that her youth and loveliness gave her over him, in his eyes, is gone, and they are equal.

Twilight has crept on: the room would be dark but for the cheery blaze of the logs that throw their warm light on every object, even to the farthest corners. Sir Tristram is seated on the sofa beside Mignon: his eyes are fixed upon the glowing logs, and his thoughts are far away upon the oft-worn track of what he will do for her when she gets well. Suddenly her hand moves, he hears an inarticulate sound, and, turning towards her, sees her eyes fixed on him in perfect consciousness, sees her poor mouth quiver, tears roll down her cheeks, hears the sound of a broken sob. In a moment his arms are around her, her head is pillowed on his breast, and he is pouring forth all the dear and tender words of love's vocabulary upon her.

She is trying to speak: he bends an eager ear to catch the sounds his ears have so long thirsted for. At first they are scarcely intelligible, but she repeats them again and again:

"I am hideous, horrible; no one will ever care for me again."

"Oh, my darling," he cries, joyfully, "I love you, love you tenfold if you care to have my love. You are as dear and sweet to me as ever. I did not love you only for your beauty. And in time" (soothingly) "we shall be able to bring a great deal of it back."

"I am too horrible," she mutters, again, and tries to cover her poor scarred cheek with both her hands. But gently he takes them in his, and with unutterable tenderness kisses the scars, that have no horror, no repulsion for him, so great and perfect is his love.

"You are not horrible to me, my own love," he says, in his deep, kind voice, and again he kisses her.

"Raymond," she murmurs.

He is smitten with a sudden chill: involuntarily his shielding arms relax: he presses his lips tight in dumb pain. Oh, God! is the first thought of her returning reason indeed for that other? He waits in silent pain for her next words.

"He said so; he said so," she reiterates, again and again.

"What did he say, darling?" asks her husband, in a low voice, trying to stifle his bitter pain.

Mignon makes an effort to bring out her words, but they

are almost inarticulate. Sir Tristram bends his ear close to catch them.

"He said," she mutters, "that if I had the smallpox, or were crushed in a railway accident, no one would ever care for me again."

"Did he?" cries Sir Tristram, taking again that dear burden into his faithful arms. "Oh, my darling! I think he did not know what true love meant."

And when Mary comes in he goes away to his room, and reverently and devoutly upon his knees thanks God for what seems to him the greatest blessing and happiness that has ever been granted to him. For now he no longer doubts that his darling's reason will return to her.

CHAPTER XL.

"An accent very low
In blandishment, but a most silver flow
Of subtle-pacéd counsel in distress,
Right to the heart and brain, though undescried,
Winning its way with extreme gentleness
Through all the outworks of suspicious pride."

TENNYSON.

IT is an April day,—a weeping, smiling day,—a day whose tears are sudden, passionate, and quickly over as a child's, whose smiles are too intensely bright and sweet to last; a day especially anathematized by coachmen, for its bonny sunshine tempts their masters and mistresses out, and its merciless showers drench cattle and harness through and through. Their own clothes and hats they don't so much mind about, their fortitude being increased by the secret knowledge of their employer's chagrin. Among the candidates to be the eighth wonder of the world, I would offer a place to the coachman who voluntarily put on an old hat when the weather was unsettled, or a footman who unfurled the carriage-umbrella as soon as the first drops of rain began to descend.

Mrs. Stratheden, prescient of coming storm, although

Phœbus looks at this moment as if he was determined to spend the rest of the day with Mother Earth, has ordered the victoria with one horse. She is going to pay a visit of congratulation to Kitty on no less important an occasion than the birth of a son and heir to the house of Clover. About a month has elapsed since the events of the last chapter, and Master Clover is nearly three weeks old. Olga finds her little ladyship sitting up in state, looking perfectly lovely. Her face is like a blush rose; she is apparelled in velvet the color of the sky, set off with much fine lace; on her golden curls is perched a dainty confection from some eminent artist. (One really cannot give the same name to this ethereal production and the crochet pincushion cover with which modern housemaids keep up the good old tradition of caps.) By her side, on the sofa, snoozes a pug, black-faced as even Diabolus is painted, while from a basket on her right peers a face no less swart, relieved by a bilious eyeball. They know Olga, and hold her in much esteem: therefore they do not greet her with that deafening uproar, that setting of every separate hair on end, with which it is the custom of well-bred pugs to receive visitors at their house. Instead they assume a grovelling and servile demeanor as they wriggle towards her, uncurling for an instant their crisp tails to give them a friendly wag.

"What!" laughs Olga, after she has kissed their mistress and addressed a few words to them in dog-language which they understand perfectly; "Strephon and Chloe still in possession! Pray, where is the baby?"

"Poor darlings!" answers Kitty, looking affectionately at the wistful black faces which are waiting anxiously to hear what is going to be said about them; "you don't think" (reproachfully) "that I would forsake them for a rival,—even for a baby of my own. Could Missis be so hard-hearted?" she says, apostrophizing them; and they roll their eyes and loll their tongues pathetically, and answer, as plainly as they can speak, "No, never."

"Nurse will bring baby directly," says the young mamma, with an important air. "Now, remember, my dear, I am not one of the foolish mothers who expect every one to go into raptures over their children. The only thing I would rather you did not say" (with merry, twinkling eyes) "is that he is like Jo. His mother says baby is the image of what Jo was

in *his* infancy; and she seems to think I ought to take it as a compliment."

"She is delighted with her grandson, of course," says Olga.

"Delighted is no name for it, my dear. But you see, excellent as she is, I am not equal to dear mamma and reminiscences of Jo's teething all day long, so I have to send baby away when I wish to dispense with his grandmamma's company. And then she hates these poor darlings so" (pulling Strephon's ear), "and calls them beasts of dogs, that no Christian mother blessed with a precious babe of her own ought to look at."

Chloe, sitting on Olga's velvet flounces, with her head leaning against her, and her big pathetic eyes solemnly upturned, verifies this dreadful recital.

"And are they very jealous of the baby?" asks Olga, laughing.

"The instant he appears they both jump up on me at once, and try to spread themselves out so that there shan't be any room for him."

As Kitty speaks the words, the door opens and admits a comfortable-looking elderly woman, bearing the heir of all the Clovers, and the pugs carry out their mistress's statement by taking immediate and jealous possession of her, licking her hands and doing their utmost to divert her attention from the hated stranger. Olga takes Master Clover in her arms, praises the faint golden fluff on his head, tries to imagine she detects a resemblance to Kitty, and he rewards her with an apoplectic gurgle, which nurse affably interprets into a sign of satisfaction at making her acquaintance. A moment later, the Dowager Lady Clover sails in, her ringlets stiff and her cap-ribbons fluttering with delightful agitation.

"You must decide," she says, graciously, to Olga, after the first salutations, "whom this cherub takes after. Is he not the image, the breathing image, of his papa?"

Olga looks from the babe to its lovely young mother, and is fain to confess in her heart that the little, pasty, blunt-featured atom has a good deal more in common with Sir Josias than with the piquante rosebud on the sofa. But she remembers Kitty's injunction, and tries to steer a medium course by seeing a likeness to both.

"I really believe," says Kitty, with a mischievous laugh,

"that in your heart you think him the image of Strephon, if he only had a black face, or Strephon a white one."

"My love," expostulates the dowager, severely, whilst Olga cannot help smiling, "you should not say these things even in jest. When you remember the way in which dogs are alluded to in the Book of books, it is impious, I think, to name them in the same breath with this sweet Christian infant."

"He isn't a Christian, you know, yet, mamma," says Kitty, wickedly: "he hasn't been christened."

The dowager looks shocked.

"I appeal to you, Mrs. Stratheden," she remarks, with great gravity. "I can't make dear Kitty see it" (the "dear" is slightly acid). "Do you not think, now she has this blessed darling, it is—I really must say it—wicked, a tempting of Providence, to fondle these—these animals?" looking rancorously at the pugs, who cast an appealing glance at Olga.

Olga pauses a moment, but the dowager's eye is severely and questioningly fixed upon her.

"You see," she answers, gently, "Kitty has made such pets of them, and they have been such an amusement to her. and dogs are so faithful and so intensely sensitive to neglect from those they love,—don't you think it would be rather cruel if she were to banish them all at once?"

"There!" cries Kitty, triumphantly; "you hear that. Go at once" (to the dogs) "and give a hand to your champion." And Strephon and Chloe with intense gravity march up to Olga, and, sitting down on their haunches, offer her their right paws.

Olga laughs, and the dowager hides her discomfiture in a rapturous embrace of the neglected babe. Apparently her sympathy annoys him, for he doubles his fists and begins to scream lustily, whereupon nurse takes hasty flight, much gratified by a handsome and stealthy douceur from Olga, under pretext of one last admiring glance. The dowager, quite certain that nurse has been making an impromptu pincushion of her idol, follows to see fair play.

"You see," says Kitty, plaintively, "I never can have him all to myself. Mamma is very excellent and good, of course, but—but—a little of her goes a long way. If I only knew when she meant to go! I asked Jo last night to give her a hint; but, poor dear! he looked so distressed, I hadn't the

heart to say any more. She tells him it wouldn't have lived till now but for her!"

"I suppose it is a great pleasure to her," remarks Olga, rather perplexed what to say, but sympathizing very much with Kitty in her heart for having such a belle mère.

"Now," says Kitty, abruptly, "let us forget her. Tell me all about poor Mignon. You can't think how I reproach myself for ever having quarrelled with her. I never was so sorry for any one in all my life."

"She is wonderfully better," answers Olga, cheerfully. "We think she will have her reason again perfectly in time, and there is every hope that she will not be so very much disfigured ultimately."

"Poor thing! how *does* she bear it?" says Kitty, her eyes brimming with great drops of sympathy: "she was so lovely and so devoted to admiration. Do you know, at the time, I could hardly help thinking it would have been a mercy if she had not lived?"

"I felt so at first," answers Olga, gently; "but we are not so wise as One who orders our destinies. If, as I almost hope may be the case, she learns to love Sir Tristram for his intense goodness and devotion,—if she comes to find her happiness at home instead of in the world,—won't it be better than if she had kept her beauty and—and it had perhaps spoiled her life?"

"How heartless of Raymond to rush off at once, before he knew whether she would live or die!" cries Kitty, indignantly.

"Poor boy!" answers Olga; "it did seem so; but, oh, Kitty, if you had seen him as I did! He must have suffered horribly: he was so pinched and ghastly-looking, I hardly knew him. He is very sensitive, you know."

"Sensitive!" echoes Kitty, incredulously. "Much love he must have had, to fly from her like the plague because he thought her beauty was gone. That is just like men."

"Not all men," says Olga, softly. "Look at Sir Tristram! If you could see his devotion, his perfect love of her, his thoughtfulness, you would never say a word against a man again. And really, my dear" (smiling), "I cannot imagine that you have any right, from your own experience, to speak harshly of the sex."

"I like to call them wretches and think they are," laughs Kitty. "It gives me a pleasant feeling of superiority to talk

of their wickedness and selfishness. My own experience! no indeed! Jo is the dearest, best fellow in the world, and I treat him shamefully. But he likes it, you know: it wouldn't be me if I did not tease and worry and gird at him from morning till night."

"I don't think you have very much on your conscience," smiles Olga.

"Tell me some more about Mignon," says Kitty; and Olga complies.

"Ever since the day, about a month ago, that she recovered her reason and had a great fit of crying, she has been perfectly sensible, though sometimes she sits for whole days without saying a word. She is generally more or less in an apathetic state: she rarely smiles, and every now and then has terrible fits of crying,—poor dear!—when she suddenly remembers the change in her looks; and some days she has frighful headaches, and cannot raise her head from the pillow. Is it not strange?—she used to dislike me, you know, and now she always seems pleased to see me; and when these frightful pains come on, nothing soothes her so much as my passing my hand gently to and fro over her hair."

"Poor thing!" ejaculates Kitty. "How I should like to see her! As soon as I drive out I will go to her."

"I almost doubt if she would see you. She is very sensitive about being looked at: none of the servants are allowed to see her: the nurse, her sister, and Sir Tristram wait upon her entirely. But I will hint at it, if you wish."

"Do!" cries warm-hearted Kitty. "I feel as if I can never be happy until I have thrown my arms round her and kissed her and asked her forgiveness (only in my heart, of course, for all these bygones must be bygones). Does she ever allude to Raymond?"

"Only in one way. It seems that once, I suppose when they had some little quarrel, he told her that if she were to lose her beauty, no one would ever care for her again,—that there was nothing else lovable in her."

"What a brute!" cries Kitty.

"You forget, my dear: she *was* beautiful then, and how could he forecast so awful a calamity? This seems always in her thoughts; nothing Mary or I can say gives her any comfort."

"Poor, poor Mignon!" sighs Kitty.

Six more weeks, lighted by an ever warmer-waxing, longer-tarrying sun, journey towards summer. May is drawing to his last days, and Olga is still at The Manor House. The charm of London seasons is wearing off for her. She is no longer under the magnetizing influence that draws folk town- and smokewards when the country is putting forth her charms most lavishly to stay them. She has not even made her annual curtsy to her Sovereign, nor given definite orders to the housekeeper in Curzon Street to make ready for her advent.

There are various reasons for this tardiness and indecision: perhaps the strongest is that one day when she broached the subject of her departure to Mignon, the poor thing burst into tears and entreated that she would not leave her again. For at the beginning of the month, feeling a want of change, she had run over to Paris for a fortnight, and Mignon had missed her terribly, and been almost inconsolable. Lady Bergholt has not lost her old petulant, exacting ways; though it is infinitely touching sometimes to see how the poor thing will suddenly stop short and sigh, and leave some imperious sentence unfinished, as if she remembers that she no longer has the right to exact.

But, beyond her sympathy for Mignon, Olga is feeling a lack of interest in the things that once gave her pleasure. The world seems empty and unsatisfying; her heart aches with longing for a separate individual interest in life; the threads and fragments of other more complete lives that come in contact with her own give her a sense of dissatisfaction. It seems an empty, undesirable fate to lead a life of which her own pleasure is the sole centre and object. She repents,—in spite of all that common sense can urge,—repents bitterly of sending Leo away. The more other men approach her with admiration and love, the more she feels drawn towards the young fellow who had given her his first, freshest, sincerest love. After the pleading of his impassioned voice, the love-making of other men seems stereotyped and unnatural. Lord Threestars, laying aside his habitual languor, had been very much in earnest in his wooing, but Olga, who liked him as a friend, was utterly unmoved to any warmer feeling for him. For Leo she has that feeling of protection that a woman invariably has for a man younger

than herself, and which in no way detracts from his lordship over her heart, nor lessens his dignity in her eyes.

Olga is not of a sanguine disposition: she is perhaps more prone to take the pessimist's than the optimist's view of life. She tells herself that Leo will come back cured of his love for her; he may have sworn allegiance to a new mistress; politics, ideas that she has given him, may rival her; or perhaps, she thinks with a jealous pang (American women are very handsome and fascinating), perhaps some younger, fairer woman than herself may console him for the love that gave him so much pain. And, now that it is too late, she tells herself how much her money and influence might have helped him; how she might have pushed him forward to a brilliant and useful future. He had written to her in answer to her letter, but he made no allusion to the old love, and she chose to think it was because he was forgetting it.

"If he ever comes back! if he still cares for me!" she says to herself; but she finishes the sentence with a sigh only.

To return to Mignon. If one believed in a system of rewards and punishments for our actions in this life, one might wonder what iniquities this poor child had committed to draw down upon herself so awful a retribution. Her little selfishnesses, her love of pleasure, her comparative carelessness for the feelings of others, which were after all very much the result of an injudicious spoiling, were surely not enough to call forth such a visitation. Every day makes her more keenly alive to her misery,—every day that improves her bodily health and helps her system to rally from the shock it has received. She has banished all the mirrors; she will not permit a servant to come near her; she says daily to her husband, unconvinced by his unceasing devotion, "You do not really care for me: it is only pity." And to all his lavish tenderness and endearments she only says, with a touch of her old scornful mirth, "You are a wonderful actor, you do it most naturally, but there is nothing to love in me now." And always when she says this she falls to bitter weeping. Once now and then she is touched by his goodness, and says, taking his hand,—

"How good you are to me! I have not deserved it. I did not go to you in London when you sprained your ankle. And you have never once left me all these months. Do, do go and have a holiday, and" (her voice quivering) "go to Lon-

don and see some pretty faces, and try to think I am only a dreadful nightmare."

"My darling," cries Sir Tristram, grieved to the heart, "do not say these things. How shall I make you believe that you are as dear to me, nay, dearer than you ever were? Shall I go and get my mother's Bible and swear upon it? You know I would not lie upon that."

"I do not know," she answers, captiously: "there are some lies more holy than truth, and you might think that one. Come" (smiling a little), "sit on this side of me," pointing to her right side, "and look only at my profile, and try to think both sides are alike."

He humors her whim, and sits down as she bids him, and looks tenderly at the profile that is as lovely as ever.

"I will have a mask made for the other side," she says, trying to smile, but ending in tears.

By dint of much persuasion she has been induced at last, chiefly by Olga's efforts, to drive out. She is covered with a thick veil; the coachman and footman are emphatically forbidden even to look in her direction; the woman at the lodge, the people about, are all warned not to salute nor seem to see her. She always carries a large parasol, and the companion of her drive has orders to warn her of the approach of any one, that she may hide her face. So morbidly sensitive is she about her altered looks, she will not permit either her father or mother to come to her. After a time she begins to study with much interest how the ravages of her beauty may best be repaired. She will go to London and have the four missing teeth replaced; she will see the most skilful surgeons, and they will surely be able to alter the drawing down of the flesh from the eye, the caught-up lip, which is now her greatest disfigurement. She is full of this one day when Olga comes to see her.

"I know I can never be beautiful again," she says, in a pathetic voice. "I don't expect or hope for it: all I want is that people may not shudder when they see me. Oh!" she cries, bursting into bitter tears, "what did I ever do to deserve this? —how can people say God is good or just?"

Olga's only answer is to lay the poor head against her tender breast, and kiss the golden hair.

"It *is* hard, darling," she whispers, presently. She is not

of those who have ever ready at their lips texts of Scripture appropriate to condemn the repining of the stricken at heart: the words of Job's reproach to his officious friends could never have been applied to her:

"I also could speak as ye do, if your soul were in my soul's stead. I could heap up words against you, and shake mine head at you."

Rather these:

"But I would strengthen you with my mouth, and the moving of my lips should have assuaged your grief."

"What can I do?" says Mignon, presently, with a gesture of despair. "The women in books, when they lose their beauty, turn religious, and go about and visit the sick. But" (with a little shudder) "I cannot. I do not like the thought of it any more than I ever did. Misfortune hasn't turned me good: I think I am more wicked. I never used to feel so bitter and spiteful as I do now. I wish I were a Roman Catholic! I would go into a convent."

Olga takes her hand, and looks at her with humid eyes.

"My dear," she says, gently, "there is work for you to do in the world,—better work than you could do by shutting yourself away from it. You have a great deal in your power."

"No," cries Mignon, sharply; "I have not. I have nothing."

"Yes, you have. First of all, you can make your husband very happy. *You know* he loves you with all his heart; *you know*, although you feign not to believe it, that he loves you as dearly as in your most beautiful days,—more, because you have need of him, and a real, true, noble love is not altered by circumstances that would destroy an ignoble one."

"Like Raymond's!" breaks in Mignon, passionately. "Oh, I did not think he could have been so base and cruel! I never cared for him" (vehemently). "I never pretended to. I always laughed at his protestations of devotion, and made fun of them, but I did not think he could have treated me so. If he had been unhappy about me, if he had stayed to see whether I lived or died, if he had sent some message to me, shown some sorrow or pity for me, I could have forgiven him; but to leave me so! oh, I hate him! When I think of him, I long for revenge, I long to hear of him in pain or misery, I——"

"Hush, my dear," says Olga, softly. "Shall I tell you

what to do when these bitter thoughts come to you? Remember, not that you have lost an unworthy love, but that you have always with you a pure, perfect one, a life bound up in yours, which thinks itself amply repaid by a little love, a little tenderness, from you. You need go no further afield to do good than your own home. Try to make your husband happy, and you can do it so easily by a few smiles, a tender word now and then, and when you are better and able to think of other duties, try to find some one who is miserable and in want, whom a little help from you can perhaps make happy. You can't think what a cure for misery it is to relieve the pain of others."

Mignon looks at her attentively.

"How good you are!" she says, remorsefully. "And I used to hate you so!"

"At all events, you do not hate me now," answers Olga, with a bright smile.

"I love you!" cries Mignon, throwing her arms round her. "I think I love you almost better than any one except Gerry. And" (looking intently at her) "I used to say you were not pretty. I used to say I wondered what men saw to admire in you. I can see it now. It was only my spite and jealousy. I remember saying to that nice-looking, fair young fellow, Raymond's friend, I forget his name, that you were old and *passée*, and he turned upon me so angrily and said you were his idea of a perfect woman in *every* way. Why do you blush? I hated him for saying it then, but now I agree with him."

The rosy flush spreads to Olga's throat and neck: she is conscious of a thrill of keen pleasure.

"I do want to be good," says Mignon, earnestly. "I know I never shall be; but if you talk to me often, it will put me in mind of it. I never wanted to be good before: one must be something" (with unconscious pathos), "and if one cannot be beautiful, one ought to be good."

CHAPTER XLI.

"For there is more, I thought, in man and higher
Than animal graces, cunningly combined,
Since oft within the unlovely frame is set
The shining, blameless soul."

Songs of Two Worlds.

HAVING resolved to go to London to obtain the best advice how to repair the ravages of her beauty, Mignon is feverishly anxious to be off at once. But, as she hates the thought of the publicity of a hotel, Olga proposes that she shall spend a week with her in Curzon Street, while Sir Tristram looks about for a house. It is to be quite a small one, Mignon insists, and no visitor is to set foot in it. No one is to know they are in town; no civilities are to be exchanged with any one: even Olga has to promise faithfully that her guest shall see and be seen by no one. Indeed, she promises more than is asked of her, for she promises to devote herself entirely and unreservedly to Mignon during the time that she is under her roof. Even Mrs. Forsyth is to be left behind,—an arrangement in which she cheerfully acquiesces, though with secret displeasure.

And we know enough of Olga to be quite sure that she carries out her promise to the letter. Her boudoir is devoted to Lady Bergholt's sole use; no one is permitted to enter it; they drive there in the evening, waited upon by Truscott, to whom Mignon does not object. He has sufficient delicacy, even without Mrs. Stratheden's hint, never to let his glance fall upon her ladyship's face. He so far renounces his dignity as to take the footman's place on the box of the brougham when his mistress succeeds in persuading Mignon to drive out, thickly veiled and concealed in a corner of the carriage, to watch the gay world in which she took so prominent a part this time last year. The poor child suffers at the sight, but it is a relief from the ennui which is beginning to afflict her now that her apathy is wearing off.

Olga reads to her, sings to her, talks to her, mesmerizes her,

devotes herself perfectly and entirely to her for the week they are together, and Mignon's moods become softer, less petulant. Her manner to Sir Tristram is more gentle, more affectionate, than it has ever been. He is, in truth, far happier than he was twelve months ago, and he wears this crushed flower more tenderly and fondly in his breast than the proud, strong-stemmed lily of last year.

Sir Tristram finds a house very near Olga's, much to his wife's satisfaction, and Olga superintends the arrangement of it, half fills it with flowers, transfers many delicate knick-knacks that can be well spared from her own house, and by a few artistic touches makes it look charming before Mignon enters it. She has not forgotten a careful shading of light which she knows will be grateful to the poor beauty who a little while ago could bear unblushing the keenest gaze of an inquisitive sun. Olga has to promise that she will very, *very* often come and see her poor friend, who cries when she leaves her for the first time.

Poor Mignon! day by day the trial seems more bitter to her: sometimes she feels it is more than she can bear: in the night, wild thoughts come to her of shaking off a life that has become intolerable. From behind her blind she sees gay carriages roll by with well-dressed, happy women in them (they *must* be happy, she argues: every woman must be happy who can show an unscarred face to the world). She no longer cares for dress: of what use are fine clothes to her, now that there is only herself to see them? I suppose there are very few wives (even affectionate ones) who think it worth while to dress for their husbands. Perhaps, as a pendant to that remark, I might add, I suppose there are very few husbands (even affectionate ones) who know the color or material of their wife's gown. Sir Tristram tries to tempt her to take an interest in her toilette: he orders costly and elegant apparel to be sent for her inspection, but she generally rejects them with a pettish shake of the head. One day a handsome black costume comes for her approbation. Suddenly a remark of Olga's about giving pleasure to others enters her mind. "I will keep it," she says, blushing a little. "I think Regina would like it."

This is Mignon's first step towards a thought for others; and she feels so pleased with herself that she is tempted to repeat her kind action. Sir Tristram is perfectly delighted;

he turns aside, that she may not see a treacherous dimness in his eyes.

Every evening he reads to her: she likes it because it generally sends her to sleep, and she has the capacity for sleep that most healthy young people possess. The only recreation he permits himself is afternoon whist at his club. Mignon does not like him to drive with her, as she fears his being recognized.

She is getting very weary of seeing no one. One day she surprises her husband by saying, "Mr. Conyngham may come and see me. No doubt" (with a touch of the old scornful manner) "it will be a great pleasure to him. And when he comes I will see him alone."

Fred loses no time in obeying the summons. His heart is a very kind one at the core, in spite of all the hard things he loves to say, and his pleasure in depreciating human nature. It is so kind, really, that his other self is very often much ashamed of and very much inconvenienced by it. I think no one out of her own family has been more thoroughly grieved or sorry for Mignon than he: many a time has he thought over hard words spoken to her in his anger at her triumphant consciousness of her beauty, and heartily wished them unspoken.

Her misfortune has taken the sting for her out of him now. She may be as petulant, as wayward, as she will, she shall wring no sharp retort from his lips again forever.

"I do not suppose it has sweetened her temper, poor soul!" he says to himself, as he goes up the stairs. "She is not the sort of woman to be softened by trouble, or I am very much mistaken."

Sir Tristram opens the door, and he goes in alone, goes straight towards her, and takes both her hands in his. He cannot quite trust his voice: there is an unwonted huskiness in his throat. But she does not give him time to speak.

"Well," she says, raising her eyes unblenchingly to his, and speaking in the rather shrill key he has been accustomed to when she was excited in controversy, "are you not glad? are you not delighted?"

"My dear," he answers, in a voice quite strange to her ears, it is so quiet and solemn, "what do you take me for. Believe me, there is no one else who has felt and feels more deeply for

you than I. I am glad you sent for me. I have been longing to come to you ever since I knew you were in town, to ask you to forgive me for many unkind and bearish words I have upon my conscience. We shall be the best of friends in future, I hope, my dear." And he gives the hands he has not yet relinquished a hearty squeeze, and sits down beside her on the still beautiful side of her face.

"Ah," she says, in a voice quivering from nervous excitement, and with a short, forced laugh, "you will not have occasion to give me any more good advice now. You won't have to warn me any more, or to tell me stories about women who have spoiled their lives,—not in that way, at least. No one is likely to want to run away with me now: are they?"

Her voice trembles between tears and laughter. She is growing hysterical.

"I don't know," Fred answers, stoutly. "I don't see so very much amiss. But, all the same, I hope no one will want to run away with you, or you with them, because I trust you have found out what a good fellow Tristram is, and how much more such love as his is worth having than——"

"Oh, yes, I know,—I know," she interrupts him, wearily. "He is very good." Then changing her tone, and speaking almost penitently, she says, with emphasis, "Yes, indeed he is very, *very* good!"

Fred stays a long time with Mignon. He exerts himself to the utmost to amuse her, and when he is going she says, with frank simplicity,—

"I did not think you *could* be so nice. Come again, won't you?"

"That I will, as often as you like. But I have something else to propose. Come and see me."

Mignon shakes her head.

"Nonsense, my dear child!" he says, "you cannot shut yourself up forever. Now, listen to my proposal. Come to-morrow at five: you shall see no one, I promise. You can amuse yourself by looking out of my window, which, as you know, has a very cheerful prospect. At half-past six we will dine. I know your favorite dishes" (smiling), "and afterwards we will have a box at the theatre. There is a piece at the Strand that will make you die of laughing. You can put on a mantilla, and sit behind the curtain, unless you like to

turn your beautiful side outwards and have every one staring at you."

It takes a long time to get Mignon's consent to Fred's proposal, but ultimately all her scruples are overcome: she goes, and enjoys her evening thoroughly. As for Fred, to see his tenderness and care of her, you would be divided, if you did not know the party, between surmises as to whether he was a doting father or an infatuated lover. Mignon has a return of her old high spirits.

"You must not be too fascinating," she whispers to him, laughing, "or you will have to warn me against yourself next time. Why were you never like this before?"

"Because I don't think you ever gave me the chance," he answers. "I am sure I never thought *you* half so charming before."

"In spite of my ugliness?" she says, growing sad.

"You are not ugly," cries Fred: "nothing can make you that. And believe me, my dear, that a gracious manner, and the charm of mind, are better in the long run than mere beauty; for, though beauty may win love more easily, these, when they have won it, keep it."

After this Mignon is often persuaded to go to the theatre, and, becoming less shy of being seen, she drives every evening in an open carriage, starting just at the time that every one else is coming home. She swears by Fred now: she can do nothing without him. Sometimes she has fits of the old imperious petulance, but do what she will, she can never provoke a sharp retort or a cutting word from him. And in time she leaves off trying.

It is settled that in July they are to go a *parti carré* to Switzerland and the Rhine,—Sir Tristram and Mignon, Fred and Mary.

"And if you dare to fall in love with Mary, or pay her more attention than me," says Mignon, half laughing, half jealous, "I shall send her home." For, to tell the truth, there are symptoms that Fred is beginning to discover in Miss Carlyle many of the attributes of the model woman of whom he discoursed to Sir Tristram on our first acquaintance with him.

"She has the grace of manner and the charm of mind, I suppose," says Mignon, teasingly.

"And she is quite pretty enough for anything," cries Fred, warmly.

"You are a faithless monster," pouts Mignon; "and I will never please you by saying I love your dear old ugly face again."

"But if I can't have you for a wife, why may I not love you as a sister?" says Fred, half grave, half laughing.

Mignon, whose nature craves excitement, finds the nearest approach to it in travelling. She has always loved open air, sunshine, and movement, and, now that she can no longer enjoy the aliment of men's flattery and admiration, she is beginning to find beauties in nature which she never before suspected. Formerly her first idea had always been to *poser* as an object of attraction herself; now, in her almost morbid self-consciousness, she desires most eagerly to remain unseen, unnoticed, and wishes to find gratification for her own senses. And travelling with two such intelligent companions as Sir Tristram and Fred could only fail to be agreeable and instructive to the dullest, most unreceptive of persons. That Mignon never was. She loved vanity and frivolity, it is true, but she was always capable of better things, only the bent of her inclinations did not lead her towards mental improvement. Here, abroad, where she rarely meets any one she ever saw or heard of, she is less sensitive about being seen, and, sheltered by her parasol, and a veil that she can drop at will, she abandons herself to the enjoyment of the fine weather and the delicious air, and recovers a great measure of her natural high spirits. She is capricious and petulant at times, says rude things, is hard to please, but still it is patent to them all that she does make occasional efforts at self-conquest, such as she never dreamed of in the palmy triumphant days of her loveliness. She is touchingly conscious of her loss of the prerogative she imagines beauty gives a woman to ride rough-shod over the rest of the world. The only reproof Fred ever gives to her sharp petulance is a smiling shake of the head, and the two sentences, spoken half in jest,—

"The grace of manner and the charm of mind."

"I shall never have them," cries Mignon. "I never had anything but my beauty; and now that is gone, I shall drop into a soured ugly wretch, whom no one cares for."

"You won't do anything of the sort, my dear," answers

Fred, kindly. "Why, you are so improved already I hardly know you,—not at all like the Mignon of last year, whom I used to bully so shamefully and rudely."

"But what has improved you?" asks Mignon. "You" (laughing ruefully) "have not lost any of your beauty, and from being the crossest old stick in the world you have become as good-natured as—as——"

"Don't try to find a simile," laughs Fred. "The effort is rarely successful."

Gradually, by almost imperceptible degrees, Mignon's manner to her husband is undergoing a change. True, she is more pettish, more capricious, more wilful with him than with any one else; but that is usually the portion of the one who loves the best. But every now and then, used as she is to his unfailing care and thoughtfulness for her, receiving it as she does, and has always done, as a simple matter of course, she is struck by some evidence of love that touches even her, and the dawn of gratitude begins to break for the first time in her heart. He is never importunate, never puts forth any claim to her thanks: he does all, thinks of all, content with love's reward of knowing it has done its utmost. Sometimes, in passing him, Mignon will lay her hand on his shoulder caressingly, or bestow a bird-like kiss on the top of his head; sometimes she will so far condescend to perch for a moment on his knee, with her pretty side turned towards him; and once or twice she has been touched into crying, "How good you are, and how little I have deserved it!"

So that, after all, one may hope this awful blow which has fallen upon her may turn out to be a "blessing in disguise."

Meantime, a quiet matter-of-fact kind of wooing is going on between the other couple. Fred has dropped his biting cynicisms on the marriage state; has left off lauding the comfort and peace of bachelorhood: he begins to see good where he had declared there could but be strife and misery before. He does not look forward with any satisfaction to his return to those comfortable chambers in Piccadilly: a well-organized but empty room, the hired smiles of welcome of a civil servant, do not offer him that sense of tranquil *bien-être* they have been wont to do. Unromantic Fred has been troubled of late with visions of a tender woman's greeting smile, of kind, soft eyes that shall be glad of him, of a gentle hand to smooth the creases from

his world-worn brow, of sweet lips ready to oppose a loving charity to his sharp cynical utterances. He has found this bright particular star, a good woman, he thinks,—one who is pious, yet not narrow-minded, charitable, not self-righteous, high-principled, yet sweetly tolerant of the short-comings of others,—not censorious, not selfish, but finding her pleasure in yielding her own will and comfort to that of others. And Mary, who has that gentle and good gift of discovering virtue behind however thick a crust the possessor elects to wall it in with, has found much to admire and respect in Fred, and is by no means averse from the thought of spending the rest of her pilgrimage in his company.

So it happens that one September morning, Fred having quietly but persistently overcome every one's scruples and prejudices (Mignon's was the strongest), he and Mary are quietly married at a little English church in a foreign town. After a brief honeymoon they return to Sir Tristram and Lady Bergholt, and all proceed on their way to Italy.

It is hard upon Sir Tristram, who, heartily sick of foreign travel, has looked forward so keenly to the pleasures of English country life, to be dawdling in foreign cities that he knows by heart, instead of striding through stubble and turnips after partridges, or shooting his coverts on crisp autumn days, or cub-hunting, or riding around his farms. But he never hints at the privation it is to him, never shows symptoms of the weariness he feels, and Mignon, whose perceptive faculties are not acute, does not suspect the home-sickness from which her husband is suffering. For her own part, she loathes the very name of Bergholt: she never wants to return there: she has not forgiven the coldness of her county neighbors, in spite of the handsome way in which, after her accident, they allowed bygones to be bygones, and vied with each other in attention, inquiry, and sympathy. Lady Blankshire wrote quite a touching letter to Sir Tristram, came frequently to inquire personally after the poor sufferer, and regularly three times a week the brilliant Blankshire livery might be seen traversing the road between the Castle and Bergholt Court. She is none the less "an old cat" in Mignon's eyes. But for no one does she feel the bitterness that Raymond has awakened in her soul.

"Oh," she said one day to Olga, clasping her hands, and speaking with suppressed passion, "I would give almost every-

thing I have, only to be revenged on him! If I could only hear that he was ill, or hurt, or maimed, that he had lost all his money, or met with some dreadful misfortune, I think I could be reconciled to my own fate. When I think that he still goes about the world, well and handsome, telling lies, perhaps, to other women, talking of his romance, his poetry, his sympathy, his power of sacrificing his life, his future, for one he loved, it makes me feel as if I should go out of my senses. I never thought" (with intense passion) "that I could hate any one as I hate him!"

"Hush, dear," said Olga, softly: "do not encourage such thoughts. Those who hate are always miserable: the least satisfying passion in the world, when it is attained, is revenge."

CHAPTER XLII.

"New life, new love, to suit the newer day:
New loves are sweet as those that went before:
Free love, free field,—we love but while we may."

The Last Tournament.

Sir Tristram, who always loves to give pleasure to others, has lent the Bergholt shooting to Mr. Carlyle and Gerry, with permission to ask as many friends as they please. It is extremely agreeable to Captain Carlyle to be in a position to offer so handsome a return to men who have shown him civilities in his less palmy days, and Gerry, who is tremendously popular in his regiment, is not a little proud to give his colonel some unexceptionable shooting in the Bergholt preserves, and, later on, to gather together a few congenial spirits. We may be quite sure that he takes no liberties, and does not encroach on the kindness of which he is so heartily sensible.

Fred has got utterly sick of foreign travel, and, though he has borne it patiently for Mignon's sake, long after he is weary of it, Sir Tristram thinks it unfair that his friend shall be victimized beyond reasonable endurance. He has prevailed upon him to take up his head-quarters at The Warren for six months,

until he and Mrs. Conyngham shall have decided upon their future abode; and this arrangement has been very gratifying both to Fred and his wife. The former looks keenly forward to the sport, and the latter to being near her mother, who, it is evident, sadly misses her.

Regina is to join Lady Bergholt in Paris the beginning of the year, and, meantime, Sir Tristram and his wife are going up the Nile, as Mignon's thirst for travel remains unquenched. Her husband is consoled by the thought of having her all to himself: he has become so necessary to her now that the idea of his constant society does not bore her as it once did.

The beginning of February finds them back in Paris, and finds also a remarkable improvement in Mignon's appearance. She is less sensitive about it, too, and no longer objects to appear in public; but she has a great dislike to being very near any one, especially a man. From a short distance the scars and the little peculiarity of expression which her accident has given her are hardly noticeable: people say at first, seeing her elegance, her perfect tournure, and her golden hair, "What a lovely woman!" Then, as frequently, they correct themselves and say, "There is something wrong about her face. What is it?" Mignon is acutely conscious of this, and always shades her left side from scrutiny with a fan or parasol. It gives her a melancholy satisfaction sometimes, when she is driving, to see heads turned to look at her in evident admiration as in the old days of her beauty; but it is a pleasure alloyed with much pain. She has resumed, to a certain degree, her taste for dress, and never spares an opportunity of making herself appear to the best advantage. But she has so utterly persuaded herself that she can never again inspire love or be pleasing in the eyes of men, that she shrinks instinctively from their company. There is a certain shyness in her manner that many people would think more taking than the confidence her beauty wore so bravely in the olden days: she has a little way of relying upon her husband that is infinitely sweet to him, and gives a charm she is unconscious of to herself. Hers is not a nature to entertain an ardent affection, but what love she has she is growing to give Sir Tristram. And to him it is a gift so precious and unlooked-for that he counts all sacrifices made for it as naught.

One evening they are at the Opera: it is a remnant of the poor child's vanity to turn her fair side to the audience,—a vanity which, though unconfessed, her husband is perfectly conscious of, and never fails to gratify by taking a box on the left of the stage.

She is exquisitely dressed to-night, as always; her lovely shoulders are bare, and one beautiful arm rests on the front of the box. Nearly every glass in the house is levelled alternately at her and another woman who occupies the box on the other side that immediately corresponds with Lady Bergholt's.

Sir Tristram, who is too much of an Englishman to be pleased for a lady in his company to be the object of much attention or remark from his own sex, might, under other circumstances, be ill pleased at his wife placing herself so much *en évidence;* but he has no heart to rob her of what, after all, is so triste a pleasure.

The lady who shares with Mignon the general attention and approbation is strikingly handsome,—on a larger scale than Lady Bergholt, also perfectly dressed, and having an air that you rarely meet with except in a Parisian. In the box, and opposite to her, is a stout man, with a bald head, gray moustache, a ribbon in his button-hole,—evidently the husband. He does not occupy himself with his wife: apparently some one else is doing that, by the smiles and charming gestures Madame turns constantly to a third person sitting in the shade behind her, with an evident desire to remain unseen. Monsieur looks discreetly at the stage, at the house, everywhere except at his wife; and when the ballet commences, a *danseuse* with enormous eyes, magnified by unspared paint, with black hair, and well-developed muscles, engrosses his whole attention. She wears diamonds of considerable value in her ears and on her breast, and she is exchanging coquettish glances with a *gommeux* in the stalls. This seems to give exceeding dissatisfaction to Monsieur, who grinds his teeth, and mutters frequently a word that seems to be almost entirely composed of r's.

Mignon has watched the occupants of this box with considerable interest: she is devoured by an insatiable curiosity to see the third person, to whom the husband pays so little and the wife so much attention, but it is not gratified. She has been able to catch a glimpse of a man's hand softly pressing

the slim hand of the lady, gloved nearly to the elbow, but the head and face are kept rigidly, with evident intention, in the shade. Mignon, looking furtively behind her fan, is conscious that the Frenchwoman is pointing her out, and expects to see her companion bend forward; but in vain: either he can see her where he sits, or he does not care to. Mignon is piqued, —she knows not why.

Could she have her wish,—could she see the face concealed behind the lady's pearly shoulders,—how the red blood would mantle in her cheek! how madly her heart would beat! For the handsome head bent towards Madame, the curved lips through which such tender words are flowing, belong to none other than Raymond L'Estrange. With a sudden start, an uncomfortable pulsing of his heart, he has, almost immediately on entering the box, recognized the woman for whom he had once professed himself willing to hold the world well lost. Instinctively he shrinks from being recognized by her, half because of the stinging memory of his neglect of her, half because he would not have her wounded by the sight of his devotion to the woman who now holds in his heart the place that she once held. His feelings are strangely mixed as he looks at her. She has been the fairest, dearest thing in life to him, she has been an object of horror and sickening disgust, now she is—simply nothing. After the first shock of surprise, he can contemplate her perfectly unmoved. How often does history repeat itself in this wise! how often a man can look in after-days with perfect impassiveness upon the woman who once gave the zest to his life, the warmth to his sunshine, the scent to his roses, who was to him the essence of all to be desired here, to be hoped for hereafter.

Raymond can even wonder, enthralled as he is by the fascinations of the woman beside him, how he could ever have been so infatuated with Lady Bergholt. He remembers with disgust how sharply she was wont to snub him, how frankly rude she used to be, how cold, how ungracious, how indifferent.

"Pshaw! I was a boy!" he mutters to himself, wishing to console his vanity for having made so gross an error. "If I had had my way, where on earth should I be now?" And he comforts himself with the thought that he is with a charming woman, who is never dull nor stupid nor ill-tempered, who never utters a word that can ruffle his keen sensibilities, and

who, greatest of all charms, has a husband who is not in the least degree jealous or afflicted by his attentions to her.

"What a charming head!" Raymond's marquise whispers to him, indicating Lady Bergholt with her eyes. "One of those lovely blonde heads that one only sees in your countrywomen."

"Do you think so?" he answers, indifferently; then, in a lower, warmer key, "In my eyes there is only one lovely head, and that is not blonde."

The marquise shows her pearly teeth in a gracious smile.

"I am not afflicted with jealousy," she says. "It is not pain to me to hear another woman praised. Come, confess she is charming,—a perfect face, and the figure of a Venus."

"You have only seen one side," answers Raymond, in a cold, dry voice. For the life of him, he cannot tell what makes him say it.

"What?" laughs the marquise; "has she the face of a Janus? Does she smile on one side and frown on the other?"

Raymond feels a pang of shame at having spoken so unfeelingly.

"She *was* very lovely," he says,—"one of the most beautiful women in England. She met with an accident in the hunting-field, and one side of her face, I am told, is a good deal disfigured."

"Ah!" murmurs the marquise, with an accent of profound pity. Merciless as men love to say women are towards each other, there is not one, I think, incapable of feeling a pang for a sister who has lost her chief weapon in the fray of life. She feels as a man might towards a fellow soldier or sportsman with his right arm disabled. "But," she continues, watching the box opposite furtively from behind the shelter of her fan, "Are you quite sure it is the same? There is some one evidently for whom she has not lost her charm,—some one to whom she is not afraid to turn her disfigured side; a handsome man, too, with a noble, distinguished air."

"Oh," returns Raymond, indifferently, "that is the husband."

"Ah," says the marquise, with arched eyebrows, "I have heard wonderful things of English husbands."

And she gives a little envious sigh, and lets her eyes fall for a moment upon her own husband, who is still angrily

watching the abnormally large-eyed *danseuse.* A little sarcastic smile curves her handsome mouth: her husband's rival is a friend of her own. Then she turns to Raymond, and says, softly,—

"Tell me, my friend, is it that you English are by nature more faithful than Frenchmen, or that your women know better how to keep your hearts than we?"

Raymond gives a short laugh.

"I think the British idol, respectability, has the most to do with it. But you do not meet with so much of it in our higher circles now."

"Ah," says the marquise, with a fine smile (if one may so translate the expressive *fin sourire*), "fidelity is a vulgar virtue. Tell me" (in a lower key), "do you think you will ever be one of the model husbands?"

"No," answers Raymond, as emphatically as though he were repudiating the possibility of infidelity to the marquise, —"never."

"Not yet," she says, softly. "Ah, mon bel enfant, love has not yet said its last word for thee. The ballet is over. Let us go."

Lady Bergholt observes the preparations for departure, and resolves to leave too,—her desire to see the third occupant of the opposite box having steadily increased during the performance. Curiosity has always been fatal to Eve's daughters, and Mignon's persistent inquisitiveness upon this occasion is only one more unneeded verification of a threadbare fact.

She does not take Sir Tristram into her confidence, but simply says,—

"I am tired, dear. Shall we go?" And he at once leaves the box to seek his servant.

He is absent some two or three minutes, whilst Mignon sees with impatience that the objects of her curiosity have already left their box.

"How long you have been!" she cries, with a touch of the old petulance, when Sir Tristram returns.

"Have I?" he answers, surprised. "I could not find James at first. And I did not know you were in such a hurry."

She takes his arm hastily, and almost runs in her eagerness to get to the door. Raymond has just put the marquise into her coupé, and is returning to the house. He comes full upon

Sir Tristram and Lady Bergholt. It is an awkward moment: he cannot possibly avoid them, and has not a moment for reflection. So he acts upon the first impulse, which is to take off his hat and advance, smiling, to meet them. A sudden, violent anger takes possession of Mignon, crimsons her cheeks, gives her a supernatural strength. With one hand she draws the mantilla sharply over her face, with the other she drags Sir Tristram, who is stopping to speak to the young man, away. There is no mistaking her gesture, and Raymond, reddening and uncomfortable, pursues his way, whilst Mignon stands, palpitating, trembling, in the clear frosty air. When the carriage comes, she throws herself into a corner in silence. Her husband does not speak to her: he sees that she is violently agitated, and thinks it kinder to leave her to herself. "Poor soul!" he reflects, "it is natural she should be agitated at seeing him;" but a pang crosses his breast lest her anger should be after all but an impulse of wounded love. He has not remarked the flirtation at the Opera that so strongly interested Mignon; he does not know how passionate a jealousy hatred as well as love can bear; he does not dream that his wife is smarting under the stinging thought that life and love still lie before the man who has been cruel and treacherous to her,—that his beauty is untarnished, his handsome curved lips can still repeat poetic lies in other women's ears, his eyes melt to the old tenderness for beauty's sake,—beauty that has not been scarred and maimed through his fault. For she is unjust, as women are apt to be, and says to herself that if he had not encouraged her to disobey her husband, she would never have gone hunting at all.

It is a longish drive to their *appartement* in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, but Lady Bergholt does not recover from her agitation: the hand Sir Tristram takes to help her alight is feverish and trembles violently. He follows her to her room, where the maid is waiting for her.

"You need not stay," Sir Tristram says, and the Abigail, though she looks surprised, goes without a word. A well-bred *man* servant never looks surprised; the more events astonish him, the more marble waxes his countenance; but a woman would have to go through a tremendous amount of training before she could be taught not to *look* her astonishment.

Gently Sir Tristram removes Mignon's shawl, and performs

the duties he has imposed upon himself: it is easy to see he is not a novice at it, and she impassively lets him do as he will, not seeming to notice that he is there at all. But suddenly, as though the strain had been too great, she gives way, and, turning, flings her arms about his neck, and, laying her head upon his breast, breaks into passionate, uncontrollable weeping. Thus he holds her, her fair head pillowed on his faithful breast, his strong arms binding her, and, though he speaks no word, she is soothed, feeling in the strength and tenderness of his clasp that his heart is her shield and buckler against the world, that, though there be false and cruel men, here at least is one whose love is perfect, whose truth is as steel, and through all the bitterness she grasps, however feebly, the truth that a lawful and pure love is the only love worthy a woman's having.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"Says she not well? and there is more—this rhyme
Is like the fair pearl necklace of the Queen,
That burst in dancing, and the pearls were spilt,
Some lost, some stolen, and some as relics kept.
But nevermore the same two sister pearls
Ran down the silken thread to kiss each other
On her white neck. So is it with this rhyme;
It lives dispersedly in many hands,
And every minstrel sings it differently;
Yet is there one true line,—the pearl of pearls,—
Man dreams of fame, while woman wakes to love."

TENNYSON.

I MUST ask the long-suffering reader, who has gone with me thus far, to let me again take the novelist's privilege, of which I have more or less liberally availed myself in this story, and, putting back the hands of the clock, return once more upon my steps. Go back with me, then, through winter's crisp frost and autumn's decay of all that summer made ripe and fair, to the hot bright day in late July, when Leo, fresh from his travels, comes joyfully back to the home of his fathers. He may have seen much to wonder at, much to ad-

mire, much that he would never have dreamed of if he had remained in England; his mind may be enlarged, his sympathies widened, by contact with men of other nations, languages, and habits; but he returns with his love and faith in his own country increased a thousandfold, as every Englishman worth his salt always does.

If you had seen him this morning, with his magnificent golden beard, you would hardly have recognized him; but now that he is shaved, and has only his fair moustache, and enough whisker to make him thoroughly English, he is very little changed from the Leo of last year. Perhaps he looks two or three years older (he looked ten with his beard): there are a few lines, of not much prominence, that thought and pain of mind have graven; he is a trifle broader, more muscular, and much more self-possessed. He is a fine-looking fellow, and I think few of his countrymen would take exception to his being pointed out as a good representative type of an Englishman. He has shaved his beard in deference to a well-known prejudice of his father's.

"I like to see a man's mouth and chin," Mr. Vyner senior is wont to say: "then I know something about him. If a man has a fool's chin and knows it, or bad teeth, I don't so much blame him; but if he only makes himself like a Skye terrier because he's too lazy to shave, or thinks he looks pretty, I object entirely. Besides, it's a beastly, dirty habit. Many a time I've seen a man at dinner making himself delightful to a woman when I've read in her eyes that she was longing to tell him his beard was full of crumbs or melted butter."

In deference to his father's opinion, then, and because he wishes to convince him that he has come back as English as he started, Leo has sacrificed what, in the eyes of many misguided fair ones, would have been his greatest ornament.

Mr. Vyner is patrolling the drive, the hall, the rooms, with excited expectation, ready to swear at anybody or anything on the slightest provocation. He never knew how dear that boy of his was until he had lost and was on the eve of finding him again. He is as nervous as a woman, and begins to think about railway accidents, and then looks at his watch and the hall clock, and fumes and frets, and pishes and pshaws at himself for an old fool. He comes with exasperation upon Hales, in a cap flaunting with gay ribbons, lying in wait behind a

door, and he sees peeping faces that he would heartily like to slap, at various coigns of vantage.

"Can't the jades let me have him to myself for one minute?" he mutters, angrily. "Women never have any decent feeling: they must poke their d—d inquisitive noses into everything."

Wheels at last. He rushes to the door, sees in the distance two figures, and beats a hasty retreat.

"Tell Mr. Leo I am in my room," he cries to the butler.

He is not going to run the risk of making a fool of himself before his servants: he does not want to share Leo with the butler and the maids, and he has a strange, nervous sensation of choking that involves a good deal of clearing of his throat. A minute more, and the cheery ring of that pleasant, beloved voice falls on his expectant ear.

"How are you, Simpson? how are you, Hales? Where is my father?"

The door is flung open, and for the life of me I cannot say in the confusion and excitement what happens then. A minute later Mr. Vyner is still shaking Leo by both hands, and there is an unwonted moisture in both men's eyes, and an uncertain quivering about the muscles of their mouths. The dogs are leaping upon Leo, clamoring frantically for notice, and he looks as he feels, right glad of his home-coming and his welcome. How much there is to tell, how much to hear, and, as is always the case, how few words either can find at first! Presently Leo is allowed five minutes' leave of absence to say, "How d'ye do?" to Hales and the butler, to give cheery words and smiles all round, and tell everybody that when his things are unpacked they will find they have not been forgotten.

"Well, my boy," says Mr. Vyner, as they smoke after-dinner cigars by the open window, "I suppose I need not tell you how glad I am to have you back."

"Not more glad than I am to get back, sir," answers Leo, heartily.

"You look twice the man you did when you went away," proceeds Mr. Vyner, looking with undisguised pride at his stalwart son. "I suppose, after all, change is a good thing. And you've quite got over your hopeless passion, eh? given up crying for the moon?"

"Yes," answers Leo, gravely.

"There!" cries Mr. Vyner, triumphantly; "did I not tell

you when you were going about this time last year with your long, miserable face, didn't I tell you that you'd forget all about it, and probably be very thankful you didn't have your own way?"

"It isn't that, sir," says Leo, quietly. "It is not that the moon is any less desirable or beautiful in my eyes, only that, like the child, I have come to realize how far off it is."

"Humph!" says his father, with grim jocularity; "then you'll have to be content with one of the lesser planets. I suppose you *will* marry; though heaven knows I don't want a woman here, upsetting the place and filling it up with gimcracks and trumpery."

"Make your mind happy, my dear father," laughs Leo. "I do not think my wife will ever give you much trouble."

So it may be seen that, if Leo has not altogether overcome the passion that has been so fraught with pain, he has at least conquered it enough to go about the world with a cheerful face and a mind prepared to take up the sterner interests of life. It is at the close of this session that Mr. Gladstone surprises the country by giving up the Premiership. Mr. Vivian takes the opportunity of retiring from Parliament, giving Leo all his influence and support. Elections and runs are things that have been described so often and so well that I will not attempt to give any details of Leo's canvassing, but content myself by saying that, after encountering sufficient opposition to give zest to success, Leo is returned as the Conservative member. He is thoroughly popular, and the manner in which he acquits himself at the trying time draws down no small meed of approbation upon him. He has lost the mauvaise honte that oppressed him formerly, and, now that he has travelled and studied and thought, he has formed opinions of his own and speaks his own convictions, not random words put into his mouth by his agents to give him a temporary popularity, and uttered without consideration as to whether he means to stand by them. Leo is not extravagant in his promises, nor does he indulge in vague and flowery rhetoric. He says simply what he means to *try* to do, and what he thinks is right and fair, and the free and independent electors who look at the frank honesty of his face, and who catch the ring of truth in his firm, quiet voice, make up their minds that for once they have got the right man in the right place. Mr. Vyner's

opinions have undergone a considerable change. The reluctant disgust with which he formerly contemplated his son's going into Parliament has given way to unfeigned pride and pleasure: he has been with Leo through all the canvassing, and has watched him with an astonished pride and respect that has many a time set the blood glowing in his veins. He cannot realize that this self-possessed man, with the frank, distinguished bearing, is the same Leo who blushed and stammered out his thanks so lamely at his coming of age. He even says humbly to himself, "I was an old fool; and, if he had listened to me, I should have missed the proudest day of my life."

The days no longer hang upon Leo's hands: he is happy and contented, as every man must be who has constant and healthy occupation for his mind. It is only women who are compelled to sit at home idle, brooding sadly over the dark side of life, and the happiness that might have been. Trite may be the saying, "Work is the universal panacea," but there is no truer one in the English language. Many years ago I met with a passage in a book that took considerable hold of my mind. I believe it was one of Mrs. Gaskell's, and at this distance of time, with no means of correcting myself by reference if wrong, I will not vouch for giving the exact words. But these are near enough: "Thinking has often made me very unhappy: acting *never* has. Do something: do good if you can,— but do something!"

Olga is suffering terribly from her enforced idleness. What can a rich woman not rich enough to be a public benefactor, like Lady Burdett Coutts, but a woman in possession of a handsome income, with no ties, no pursuit but that of seeking her own amusement, do with her life? Olga does give, generously, lavishly; but giving, to a woman in her position, generally means sitting down for a moment before her escritoire and tracing a few lines in her check-book. She visits her own poor, but they are so well cared for, this gives her very little to do or think of. There are no harrowing cases of want and misery to exercise her tender heart: she takes good care there shall not be.

This has been almost the most miserable summer she ever remembers. She has no heart or pleasure in anything, but wanders about among her flowers, and lies in her hammock on the green island, with only the heartache for company.

Tears are often in her eyes: she feels a loneliness that, in spite of the ease and luxury which surround her, makes her no more to be envied than the poor sempstress who toils in a garret, with only a crust between her and starvation. It is Olga's heart that is getting starved, and the pang of hunger is harder to bear because her hands are idle. She knows that Leo is back in England, and feels cruelly hurt by his silence. Raymond has written to her of his friend's return: he himself is still absent, and does not even talk of coming home. Leo had written once in answer to the letter his father forwarded: in it he had told her of his travels, of his intended movements, but there was not a word of love or hope, not a syllable he might not have written to a woman for whom he had never professed anything more than the most ordinary friendship. Surely women are unreasonable, and Olga, in this sense, shows no superiority over the rest of her sex. A woman will tell a man plainly that she can never be anything to him, that he must think of her as a sister,—a dear sister, if he will, but only as a sister; but no sooner does he obey or seem to obey her than she accuses him of caprice, of faithlessness, of incapability of feeling a real love. Once her slave, he must always be her slave, and hug his chains, though she treats him with coldness and cruelty, though she engages herself to another man, sometimes even though she marries another. Olga is persuaded that Leo has quite forgotten her: she tries to fortify herself by saying she has been very wise in applying the test, seeing how utterly unable he was to bear it. And yet there are times when the love of him, the desire to see him, takes such possession of her soul, she thinks she could have borne better to be unhappy with him than to be so lonely and miserable without him.

She reads in the paper that he is the Conservative candidate for D——, and sends for the local papers and devours greedily every word in them that concerns him. She is divided between joy and pain when she hears of his success,—she has grown so jealous of the new mistress, whom she herself gave him as a consolation for the loss of herself.

When it is over, she sits down to write to him. She has expected to hear something from him: he might even have had the common politeness to send her a paper. But, from first to last, he makes no sign. Then, ashamed of her own

weakness, yet unable to conquer it, she takes pen in hand, and writes him thus:

"My dear Leo,—

"I have been hoping that, in spite of all the occupation a contested election must have given you, you would find time to write a few words to one who takes pleasure in remembering (if you have forgotten it) that she first inspired you with the project that has come to such a happy fulfilment to-day. I need not tell you how glad I am of your success: if you have any remembrance of our talks in bygone days, you will divine that I am proud of it,—and of you too. I think I understand in the almost studied absence of great professions in your speech, that you fully and honestly intend to do, not as little as possible of what you promise, but a great deal more. You have probably advanced so far now in the study of politics, you are no doubt so fully decided upon the course you intend to pursue, that you no longer need a woman's enthusiasm to inspire you: you have discovered, perhaps, that it is unpractical. And yet many men have been none the worse for having a friend of the other sex in whom to confide their aspirations. They have been glad that a woman should rejoice in their success and sympathize with them in their disappointments. And may not I still be that to you, dear Leo? Of course I can imagine how much engaged you are at the present moment; but could you not find time to run down here for a day or two and resume your acquaintance with the inhabitants of The Manor House, who will all give you the heartiest welcome? Two years ago, it was, I fear, a dearer spot to you than it is now: but, remember! public men should always have good memories. Good-by. I shall be disappointed if you do not fix some time within a month to come to us. Always, dear Leo,

"Most sincerely yours,

"Olga Stratheden."

Leo has been out riding, and the second post has come in his absence. In great disgust and wrath, Mr. Vyner has beheld the Blankshire postmark, and the distinct well-bred handwriting that his soul abhors.

"Here," he says, thrusting the letter into his son's hand as he enters,—"another letter from that—that woman." (With

great difficulty he foregoes the adjective which always seems appropriate to him in speaking of her.) "She can't let you alone. For the matter of that, I never knew a woman who could. Perhaps her regard for you is increased now you're an M.P."

Leo's color rises, his heart throbs, as he takes the letter. His father watches him narrowly.

"For God's sake, my boy," he says, imploringly, "don't let her make a fool of you again."

Leo goes away with his treasure, half divided between delight and regret. The regret is that he can still feel so keen a delight at the sight of Olga's writing. He goes a good long way into the wood before he breaks the seal. As he reads it, a deep glow of pleasure comes into his heart to know that she cares so much for his success, and he begins to turn over in his mind how soon he can get away to go and see her. Next week, at the latest, he will spare two days: what is the inconvenience in comparison with the pleasure of seeing her dear face and of hearing her voice say she is glad of his success? And, after all, is it not true that he owes it to her?

But, after the first joyful determination, doubts begin to assail him. Is it worth while, for a few hours' pleasure, to fight the old battle over again, to suffer the long, weary pain of hopeless love, to see how fair and charming she is, only to realize the bitter blank of a life without her? Shall he take the zest out of his new career, weaken his energies, unfit himself for the duties which he has sworn to fulfil to the very best and highest of his ability? It costs him a long and bitter struggle to forego the pleasure he has promised himself, but in the end he conquers.

At dinner his father remarks, with extreme chagrin, that he is silent and out of sorts, and that he wears a pale and haggard look he has not seen on his face for many a day. After dinner, Mr. Vyner gets suddenly out of his chair, and, coming over to where Leo sits, lays his hand upon his shoulder, and says, with strong emotion in his voice,—

"My boy, don't go back to the old state of things. Shake off this woman's influence. Be a man. Remember, you are not your own master now."

"I know it, sir," Leo answers, with a faint smile. "You need have no fear for me."

CHAPTER XLIV.

"That they may know these golden years,
Which Love has made to seem so bright,
Were heralded by darkest night,
And earned in bitterness and tears."

Violet Fane.

Leo sits up late that night writing his reply to Olga's letter. It is this:

"My dear Mrs. Stratheden,—

"If I have not written to you about my affairs, it is not because I am either ungrateful or forgetful. I think I need hardly tell you that; for, were either the cause of my silence, I should be unworthy of a place in your thoughts. Whose sympathy could be so dear to me as hers to whose counsel and inspiration I owe the wish, the very idea, of being anything more than I was contented to be two years ago? Let me speak out to you fairly and frankly this once; let me tell you everything that is in my heart. Nothing in this world would give me so much happiness as to see you,—above all things, to see you at the dear old Manor House, with which my dearest and happiest memories are indissolubly linked. My first impulse was to go to you: I had even fixed joyfully in my own heart the day and hour when I should see you once again. It is only after a hard struggle that I have conquered myself, and resolved not to do what would give me more pleasure than anything else. The pleasure would cost me too dear. I don't want to evoke the sympathies of your kind, generous heart by telling you how intensely my love of you has made me suffer, nor how long and severe has been the struggle to rally from the miserable indifference to life and the future into which I had fallen. Thank God, I have recovered my lost energies; but the joy with which I saw your dear letter to-day makes me feel how weak I am after all, and how mad it would be to risk having to fight the long weary battle afresh. I must tell you this once, and you will forgive me if it seems presumptuous or

inconsiderate in me to repeat to you what you have told me it gives you pain to hear. You have been, you are, the one love of my life,—the incarnation to me of all that is pure and good and desirable in a woman; and I am one of those who think woman God's best gift to man. My darling,—let me call you so this last time,—I love you with all my heart and soul: how, then, do you think I can be satisfied with a poor, barren friendship? a sympathy you are ready to extend to any one who asks or needs it. I want you for mine, mine alone, mine altogether. To be only your friend, to have one hour, perhaps, with you, to a hundred away from you, and that one embittered by the thought of how soon I should have to part from you! You are not one of those women of whom one suffers satiety, whose pretty prattle is a relaxation for the moment, but which one is relieved to escape from. I see you smile, thinking to yourself that I have more knowledge of the world and of your sex than the Leo whom you remember. No; the more one has of your dear society, the more charming and precious it becomes, the more one hungers after it when one has lost it. You say men have been glad sometimes of women, to confide to those sympathizing ears their ambitions, their successes, their disappointments; but, rely upon it, they were not women passionately, hopelessly beloved, as you are by me. To give those confidences, a man must have the calm, restful feeling of friendship, not the restless passion of denied love. And so, telling you this solemn truth, I throw myself upon your mercy, and, confessing to you all my gratitude, my love, my devotion, I ask you to save me new pain by letting me try, not to forget you, but to tear you out of the every-day work of my life. You shall be my incentive to all that is good: when I want strength of purpose for some difficult task, as God knows I shall often enough, I will look at your picture, my dearest possession, and remember the noble words you used to speak to me in the old days; and if I ever achieve anything worth doing, say to yourself, 'He did it by my help, and for my sake.' God bless you, my angel, my darling! pray for me sometimes in your pure heart. I cannot help but be the better for it.

"Ever yours, and yours entirely, Leo."

Can you imagine what Olga felt when she read that letter? I will not venture on such sacred ground. I only know that

she locked herself in her room, and when she came out of it, hours afterwards, her eyes were red from crying. But there are other tears than those grief wrings from the heart. There was a small thin letter in her hand, and it held these words: "If you are *very* sure you love me as you say,—if, after dreaming me so far higher and better than I am, you can bear the awakening,—come! Oh, Leo! did you never guess it was for your own sake I sent you away?"

When Leo reads these lines, his brain reels. Over and over he scans them, almost fancying it must be a delusion. Do the gods ever grant such utter bliss to a man all at once? Then he begins to make joyful preparation for obeying her summons: he will start by the first train to-morrow. True, he has engagements for the next two or three days, and no one is more punctual or particular than Leo; but once in a man's life he may be pardoned for throwing over business and letting love make him for the moment inconsiderate of sublunary matters.

"Hey-day, Leo!" cries his father, coming in at this moment and seeing Leo's glad flushed face. "What pleasant piece of news have you got there?"

"My dearest old dad," cries the young fellow, grasping his father's hand and speaking in a voice quick and uncertain from delight and excitement, "I think I am the happiest man in the world."

"Then no doubt you are about to be the most miserable," replies Mr. Vyner, with acidity.

"Pinch me!" cries Leo, in uncontrolled jubilance; "make me quite sure that I'm awake!"

"You'll be awake soon enough," snaps his father, coming in like the chorus of a Greek tragedy.

"I can't tell you anything yet. Don't ask me any questions. I'm off to-morrow by the first train, and when I come back, then you shall know as much as I do."

"I suppose you are quite oblivious of the fact that Gresham is coming to-morrow, and that we have to go over to see Vivian in the afternoon?" says Mr. Vyner, with latent sarcasm.

"It can't be helped," says Leo, exultantly. "For once I am going to be unpunctual, impolite, inconsiderate, selfish, everything I would rather not be at any other time."

"That's right!" remarks Mr. Vyner, dryly. "An excellent way to begin your new career. I suppose now that you've got M.P. tacked on to your name you think it gives you the privilege of forgetting that you are a gentleman."

Leo is serious in a moment.

"I hope I am too much of my father's son for that, sir. Don't be hard upon me. It concerns the happiness or misery of my whole life. I will do everything that is right; no one shall be inconvenienced by my neglect; but this once everything must give way. If you knew" (grasping his father's hand and speaking with suppressed fire) "how wretched I have been, and how happy I am going to be, you would not say a word to stop me."

And with this Leo goes out, feeling four walls too narrow for his vast happiness.

"Poor infatuated lad!" mutters his father, gazing after the stalwart, retreating form. "She has done her work well, the Jezebel! How befooled, besotted he is! And now the next thing, I suppose, will be my fine madam here, turning the house out of windows and treating everything and everybody like dirt. I'll lay she's forty if she's a day,—women don't get such a hold on boys much before that age,—and paints herself like a mask. I shouldn't wonder if she's got that d——d golden hair: that sort of woman generally has. She'll have an impudent French maid, and a regiment of dye-bottles and paint-pots. I know her!" cries the old gentleman, wrathfully, imagining something as different from the real Olga as the human mind could well conceive.

Olga has received Leo's brief telegram, "I shall be with you by seven to-morrow evening." She does not sleep an hour all the night, and when morning comes she is feverish, restless, and so nervous she cannot settle to anything. So she orders her horse and goes for a brisk gallop. Oh, how the hours crawl and creep! was ever a day so long in this world before? At lunch she says to Mrs. Forsyth, trying to speak naturally,—

"Leo Vyner is coming to-night."

"Really? have you asked him? Did you expect him?"

"Of course I asked him," Olga replies, coloring a little as she speaks.

"I almost wonder he can leave home at such a time," re-

marks Mrs. Forsyth, dryly. "I should have thought he would have so much to do."

Olga does not make any answer. Mrs. Forsyth is divided between curiosity and vexation. Can it be possible that there has been anything going on all this time without her knowledge? She had relapsed into a feeling of such perfect security,—Leo abroad, Lord Harley and Lord Threestars both rejected. "She will never marry now," Mrs. Forsyth has decided. And here the lover she has always dreaded instinctively has returned upon the scene, and under the most suspicious circumstances. To be coming on a visit to The Manor House at a time when he must naturally be so much occupied, when, for an ordinary visit, a few weeks later would have made no difference to Olga, and would have been far more convenient to him.

Leo's train is three-quarters of an hour late: he does not reach The Manor House until a quarter to eight. Both ladies are in the drawing-room, and he has only just time to exchange hurried greetings and rush off to dress for dinner. But in the moment during which he and Olga have clasped hands they have understood each other. She is more beautiful, more beloved than ever in his eyes, and she feels, by the thrill of joy that quivers through her as she looks in his eyes and touches his hand, that her heart and imagination have not played her false. Olga has spent more time than usual over her toilette: her dress is soft white, covered with delicate lace, and makes her look almost girlish. The light of happiness is in her lovely eyes; a faint color tinges her cheeks.

"How absurd of her to be so overdressed!" says Mrs. Forsyth, crossly, to herself. She does not often find fault with Olga, whom she loves most truly, but she is very jealous of her caring for any one else. All through dinner she is unusually taciturn: her wonted tact seems to have deserted her; but neither Leo nor Olga remarks it,—they are far too much absorbed in each other. Olga does not disdain the gracious coquetries that make a woman so charming in the eyes of the man who loves her, and Leo, if more self-contained than in the days when his adoring glances took Truscott and the footmen into confidence as to his feelings, is not always careful to suppress the triumphant fire in his eyes. The conversation never flags for a moment: the lips of both are bub-

bling over with happy talk and laughter; to both, the happipiness, the originality of the situation seems as great as to the first man and woman. The old charm steals over Leo, the charm of the first day when the refined luxury of all the arrangements at The Manor House struck the chords of a new sense in him. And to that is added the intoxication of a first and intense love. To him, Olga is the most perfectly beautiful as well as the most beloved woman in the world: there is not one thing in her that is not altogether lovely and gracious. And her consciousness of his belief in her lends to Olga that exceeding graciousness that the belief of the man who loves her always gives to a charming and sympathetic woman.

Leo waits for a moment after the two ladies leave the room, in the hope that Mrs. Forsyth will be as considerate as in days of yore, when he had so often blessed and revered her for her judicious disappearance. His heart throbs as he goes towards the drawing-room: the strong arm falters as it turns the handle. It need not. Mrs. Forsyth is there, discoursing in a most lively wide-awake mood: evidently she has no idea of leaving them to themselves. Olga is trying to conceal her chagrin, and Leo feels provoked and disappointed. Mrs. Forsyth, who during dinner had seemed to take but very mediocre interest in Leo's travels, is suddenly seized with an ungovernable curiosity about all the places he has visited, the sport he has had, the manners and customs of the different nations with whom he has mixed. Olga is growing nervous: the strain is almost more than she can bear. At last she takes the law into her own hands. She rings the bell, and orders the lamps to be lighted in the Folly. The last few days have been bright and hot like a return of summer: no fear of finding any place in or out of the house too cold to-night. Mrs. Forsyth understands, and accepts the situation as best she may. So, when Truscott comes to announce that the Folly is lighted, she asks to be excused accompanying Olga for the present, as (with a yawn and a smile that tries to be gracious) she feels her old bad habit stealing over her.

"Beware of once beginning it, Mr. Vyner," she says, pleasantly, to Leo, but feeling in her heart that she would like to put him to a sleep that it would take him a considerable time to awaken from. So Olga, with a nervous beating of her heart, precedes Leo along the handsome hall, through whose

painted windows the silvery light falls softly, into the Folly. It is lighted just enough to lend a mysterious charm to the scene: here and there a lamp sheds a mellow radiance through many-colored glass, and from above, the moon falls happily upon the plashing silver water and velvet moss. Yet, now they are here alone, now that the moment has come that is to seal the joy of their lives, an enchantment has fallen upon them: both are tongue-tied. Is it that they are so joyfully secure of the future that they can afford to delay their happiness yet a little space? Side by side they pass together through the grove of orange-trees, between whose leaves the marble of the statues gleams whitely. Presently Olga stops before a rose. Then suddenly Leo takes both her little trembling hands in his, and says, in a low, concentrated voice, "Why did you send for me?"

He has no need to ask: no doubt or fear assails his heart; triumphant joy is written in his glad blue eyes, in every line of his comely face. And, since his question needs no answer, Olga gives it none, but in silence lifts her lovely eyes to his.

Sometimes, in happy dreams, Leo has held his heart's delight in his glad arms, drawing,

> "In one long kiss, her whole soul through
> Her lips,"

and has awaked with beating pulse and empty, outstretched arms, crying out her dear name in vain. But to-day he no longer dreams.

CHAPTER XLV.

It is the 9th of May, 1876,—a day with a bright sun and a cutting wind, such as embittered the whole spring of this year. Lady Clover has wisely decided not to venture out, as she proposes to attend her Majesty's Drawing-room on the morrow. Besides, she is expecting a visitor, and his deferred arrival causes her to glance impatiently every now and then from her novel to the clock on the mantel-piece. True, her

book is one of the most charming stories ever written, "The Boudoir Cabal," but there are states of mind that prevent one fixing one's attention on a book that at another time would completely engross us. The years that have passed since we last saw her little ladyship have only laid the weight of an additional embonpoint upon her,—a very becoming one, and not calculated to cause her the least anxiety, or any haunting thought of Banting. She has a charming little air of matronhood that vastly becomes her, and makes her, with her two lovely children, a very sweet picture. These two golden-headed cherubs, lovely enough to have been a study for Carlo Dolce or Sir Joshua, are disputing possession of the great fur rug with our old friends Strephon and Chloe, who, having come to regard them as necessary evils, tolerate them accordingly.

"Oopit, oo naughty boy, oo not to pull Koe's tail!" lisps the rosebud mouth of Kitty's daughter. "Mamma, cold Oopit."

"Rupert, darling, what are you doing to poor Chloe?" asks his mamma.

"I doin' nussin'," answers Rupert, stoutly. "Kissy put her finger in Steffy's eye."

At this moment the bell rings, and general attention is diverted to the approach of the expected visitor. The door is promptly opened; steps are heard ascending the stairs; a moment later "Mr. L'Estrange" is announced.

There was a time when Kitty, in her indignation, had vowed never to speak to Raymond again; but the lapse of years has removed her resentment, and she greets him with all the effusion due to a long-lost prodigal. For his part, his handsome face lights up with real pleasure at sight of his old friend, looking more lovely and lovable than ever.

"What centuries since we met!" cries Kitty. "I thought you were lost to us forever. Stay!" (with a little comedy air, pointing to the hearth-rug), "I have an introduction to make. '*These are my jewels*'!"

"The modern Cornelia,—black pearls and white," laughs Raymond, advancing to the rug. London life, and an immense number of visitors, have cured the pugs of their ferocity to strangers: increasing years and stoutness make it inconvenient to play a perpetual rôle of watch-dog. So now men may come and men may go with no more notice

from them than the lifting of a sleepy eye, and an occasional grumble as of distant, very distant, thunder.

Raymond is not a lover of children, but these two delicious morsels of pink and white and gold offer nothing to repel the most aversely disposed, and he accepts and returns the salutes of two pairs of rosy wet lips with equanimity, if not pleasure.

"I wanted you to see these darlings," says the proud mother. "Whom do you think they are like?"

"Will you be mortally offended if I don't see a striking resemblance to their father?" smiles Raymond.

"I suppose they are more like me," answers Kitty; "though my mother-in-law insists they are both *quite* Clovers. Now you have seen them, I won't bore you with them any longer." And she lays a hand on the bell.

"No, no, no," cries Rupert, running towards her. "Me top."

"Me top too," says little Kitty, advancing towards Raymond, and raising her clear shining eyes to his face. "Oo is a pitty man. Kissy like oo."

"What a bare-faced compliment!" laughs Kitty. "Now then, darlings, if I let you stop, will you go and sit on the rug and be quiet?"

Rupert and Kitty make emphatic promises, which they have neither the will nor the power to keep. It is to the benefit of the conversation when, a few minutes later, nurse comes to fetch them to tea, and a judicious hint of some mysterious delicacy up-stairs causes them to depart in peace.

"And what have you been doing all these years?" asks Kitty, with friendly interest, as soon as they are alone.

"Trying with more or less success to kill time," answers Raymond.

"And what are you going to do now? Settle down and become respectable?"

"Respectability is dull. I confess it has no charms for me."

"I am afraid you are not at all improved," says Kitty, in a reproving tone. "Who was that very pretty woman I saw you with at the Opera last night?"

"Oh, that was Mrs. Lascelles. Poor little woman! she has an awful brute of a husband: it is quite a charity to be kind to her."

Kitty arches her eyebrows.

"Rather doubtful kindness, I'm afraid, on the part of a handsome young man. So you go about the world championing neglected wives?"

"One should never lose an opportunity of doing a kind action," says Raymond, with something between a smile and a sneer.

"But tell me," asks Kitty, "do you still intend to lead this wandering life? Don't you ever mean to come back to Blankshire?"

"You know the house is let for three years," he answers. "There is no inducement for me to go back now my poor mother is dead. I had the letters telling me of her illness and death together, and then I was thousands and thousands of miles away from England. Poor mother!" And Raymond's brow clouds for a moment with sincere regret.

"It was very sad," says Kitty, sympathetically. "But do you still mean to live abroad?—do you really like it better than England?"

"Indeed I do. I make Paris my headquarters: I have a large acquaintance there, and I find French society a great deal more to my taste than English."

"How unpatriotic of you! And how about sport?"

"I have as much as I want; but I am not as keen about it as I used to be."

"One of these days you will bring home a French wife, I suppose."

"God forbid!" answers Raymond, devoutly. "I shall never marry."

"So I have heard many men say."

"A wife is a charming thing, no doubt," says Raymond, "but I am not sure that she always confers the greatest good in the sphere in which it is intended that she shall."

"I am ashamed of you, Raymond. Have *you* taken up the present fashion of reviling women?"

"On the contrary, I adore them. But I think they are very much the creatures of circumstance."

Before so charming a member of the sex as Lady Clover, Raymond is not tempted to air his damaging theories about women. He has been very bitter against them ever since the Marquise de C., the woman with such infinite tact, such charming, caressing manners, threw him over. Truth to tell, Ray-

mond's good looks were not a sufficient makeweight for his exactions and his perverse temper, and when he wearied her she gave him his congé remorselessly. Since then, Raymond has written bitter things of women in his heart, and rarely fails to air his scorn and contempt of them, though, like many revilers of the sex, he is seldom out of their society, and one of his greatest grievances against them is that they are not so bad as he would have them.

"Tell me all the Blankshire news," he says; and Kitty, putting her hand to her head, in an attitude of reflection, says,—

"You must be in such tremendous arrears, I hardly know where to begin. Of course you know all about Olga's marriage?"

"I know she did marry, but there my knowledge ends. It must be nearly three years, I think, since I had a wild, incoherent letter from Leo about his bliss, his rapture, and his unworthiness. I suppose he is *désillusionné* long before this."

"Indeed he is not!" cries Kitty, energetically: "he is the most utterly devoted husband I ever knew: it is positively enraging sometimes to see how he adores her."

"Why?" asks Raymond. "Do you not like her?"

"Of course I do. I love her. Does not every one? But it makes one so envious to see a woman put on a pedestal and adored as if she were a goddess. Whenever I have been with them, I always come home and lead poor Jo a dreadful life, and tell him that he does not care a bit for me."

"And what does he say to that?"

Kitty assumes a slow, solemn manner, mimicking her husband to the life.

"'My dear,' he says, 'no doubt it is very charming to be demonstratively adored by a fine, handsome young fellow like Mr. Vyner; but don't you think if a steady-going, middle-aged man like myself were to attempt those blandishments, it would rather remind you of an elephant attempting to prance like a horse?' There's a good deal in that, you know," says Kitty, mischievously, resuming her natural voice. "But, seriously, I think Olga is the happiest, the most enviable woman in the world; and you can't think how young she looks,—not a day older than when you last saw her. And though she is not at all demonstrative in public, it is easy to see how fond and

proud she is of him. He made his maiden speech in Parliament this year, a very good one indeed, and Lord B. tells me they look upon him as a very rising man. Both he and Olga have their heads full of quixotic ideas about benefiting their fellow-creatures, but it seems to make them extremely happy."

"It was a great thing for Leo, marrying a woman with a lot of money," remarks Raymond.

"So any sensible person would think," cries Kitty; "but he is such a goose that it has been quite a trouble to him. It is the only thing they ever quarrelled about. He insisted on every farthing being settled upon her, and won't touch it. His father allows him fifteen hundred a year, and, though he loves Olga to live sumptuously, and have beautiful horses, and be perfectly dressed, he will have nothing to do with her money himself. Did you ever meet old Mr. Vyner?"

"Oh, yes: I knew him very well."

"Well, he is almost as much in love with her as his son; and the most amusing part of it is, he conceived the greatest horror of her before he saw her. He is never tired of telling me what a horrid painted creature he expected to see, and how he fell in love with Olga the first time he saw her."

"What a happy family!" utters Raymond, with a curl of his handsome lip. "But what has become of Mrs. Forsyth? it must have been a bad lookout for her."

"I need not tell you Olga did everything that was liberal and generous. In the first place, she settled a handsome annuity upon her. Then she is frequently with them: when Olga spends the usual three months at Mr. Vyner's place, she lives at The Manor House, and has always free quarters in Curzon Street. Of course she did not like it at first; but she was sensible enough to make the best of it. You know Olga has a little daughter, I suppose?"

"I did not know it."

"The most lovely little creature you can imagine, with her mother's great brown eyes and her father's golden hair. Olga Catherine, my god-daughter, and betrothed to Rupert" (laughing). "But when she was a few weeks old, poor Olga nearly died. I was with her, and I thought Leo would have gone out of his mind: he was like one distraught. One day he came into my room, and, grasping both my hands, said, with tears in his eyes, 'Oh, Lady Clover, pray to God to spare my

darling! Perhaps he will hear you. What shall I do if I lose her? what shall I do?'"

"I did not know that was Leo's line," says Raymond, with a little sneer. "He used not to be celebrated for his piety."

"I don't know that he is particularly religious," answers Kitty. "But don't you think" (a little shyly, a certain dimness veiling her blue eyes) "that when one is in *awful* trouble, one's impulse is to go for help where one knows it can be given?"

"Perhaps," says Raymond, in an indifferent tone, and Kitty's momentary pathos takes flight.

"And do you think this violent love is warranted to last?" he asks. "It does not generally stand much wear and tear. And it is always rather a dangerous experiment, a man marrying a woman older than himself."

"Yes," admits Kitty, "generally speaking it is. But there seems such perfect sympathy between these two, and you know Olga is a woman in a thousand."

"Granted; but you will see Leo will be breaking out one of these days."

"Is it your creed that, as no women are good, no men are faithful?" asks Kitty, with some vivacity.

"Men have a great many temptations," answers Raymond, evasively. "But" (turning the subject, and speaking with a shade of hesitancy) "I have some other neighbors of yours to ask after,—the Bergholts."

Kitty has always declared stoutly that if she should ever have the chance she will tax Raymond with his behavior to Mignon. But here is the very opportunity, and yet she feels no desire to take advantage of it. She only says,—

"They are very well."

"Has Lady Bergholt quite recovered from her accident?" asks Raymond, in the polite but indifferent tone with which one makes an inquiry after a casual acquaintance.

"It is hardly perceptible now," answers Lady Clover. "But she can never be persuaded to believe it. One side of her face is still exquisitely lovely, and it is only a little peculiarity of expression that prevents the other being the same, for unless you are close the scars are hardly visible. I often hear people admire her immensely, and it was only the other day Colonel Grey said to me, 'What a lovely creature Lady Bergholt is! I

never saw a woman I should like more to whisper soft nothings to' (you know his droll way), 'but she always makes me sit half a mile off, and many things which are charming, uttered in a low key, lose considerably by being bawled upon the housetop or half way across a room.'"

"Her sensitiveness about her appearance must be a great comfort and safeguard to her husband," utters Raymond, with a veiled sneer.

"Yes," answers Kitty, with spirit, "they are very happy, very happy indeed: he worships her, and she is really very fond of him. You know she was never very demonstrative or warm in manner, but what affection she has she certainly divides between him and her brother. Young Carlyle has exchanged into the Guards, and lives with the Bergholts almost entirely. He is a charming young fellow: women do their utmost to spoil him, but they don't succeed, and not one of them ever makes him neglect his sister."

"How touching!"

"Yes, it *is* touching to see the love of both those men for her. I do not believe she has a wish ungratified if they can procure its accomplishment."

"And does Lady Bergholt still crush her friends with her frank remarks? is she as sweet-tempered as formerly?"

The color mounts to Kitty's cheeks. She feels thoroughly indignant with Raymond for the manner in which he is speaking of a woman for whom he once professed so deep a passion.

"I should hardly have thought *you* would have so keen a memory for her failings," she says, in a reproachful tone. "Time was when words were too poor in your eyes to express her manifold charms and graces. If one has a kind heart, when one's friends fall into misfortune one is more apt to dwell upon their good points than their bad ones, I think."

As the little lady utters this dignified reproof, her blue eyes glisten with tears, and her cheeks glow with a delicate pink, like the heart of a blush rose.

"I bow to your correction," says Raymond, a little stiffly. "But, still, tell me all the same whether she indulges in the gentle asperities with which she was wont to *écraser* one in the good old days."

"No," replies Kitty, with warmth: "she is immensely improved. She rarely says a sharp thing now, and people often

remark what a graceful, distinguished manner she has. I think a great deal of it is due to Olga."

"To Olga!" exclaims Raymond, looking surprised. "Why, I thought they were sworn foes!"

"Oh, yes, once she hated Olga; but when she was in trouble Olga nursed her, and behaved like an angel to her. One is always grateful, I think" (with a Parthian glance at Raymond), "to people who are good to one when one is in sore need of their kindness."

Raymond winces a little, but makes no answer.

"She does a great deal for the poor," continues Kitty, warmly; "not very much in the way of going to see them, but whenever she hears of any one in trouble or distress she is always ready and glad to help them. So perhaps, after all (though I always think it is a horrid, hypocritical thing to pretend to see good in other people's misfortunes), her life is happier and better than it might have been under other circumstances."

"All's well that ends well," says Raymond. "So, according to your story, every one was happy ever after."

"Yes," laughs Kitty: "the good people were happy ever after, and the wicked one was punished."

"Who is the wicked one?" asks Raymond, laughing. "Myself?"

"Yes," says Kitty, with an arch nod of her golden head.

"And how am I punished?"

"By being left out in the cold, and having no nice wife to take care of you and make you happy."

"I confess," says Raymond, "the dish of domestic bliss that you have served up for me seems so appetizing, I am half tempted to rush into matrimony at once."

"No," says Kitty, shaking her head, "you are not a man to make a good husband or to be happy with a wife."

"How do you know, pray, my lady?"

Kitty answers him, half laughing, half serious,—

"You are one of the wicked ones who, for some unknown purpose, are allowed to go about the world, turning the heads of foolish women with your handsome face and deceitful tongue, and bringing trouble and discord to the domestic hearth."

"May I ask how you have learned so much to my disadvantage?" asks Raymond, halting between amusement and pique.

"Oh, you are not at all an uncommon type of man," says Kitty, with an air of superior wisdom: "there are a good many of you going about the world just now; I meet you often. You all talk in the same kind of way: you all affect to think ill of women, and yet you are never happy out of their society; and you all have those discontented lines about your eyes and mouth."

Raymond rises and contemplates himself with extreme deliberation in the mirror over the chimney-piece.

"Now you mention it," he says, smiling, "perhaps I'm not a particularly beaming-looking fellow. Well, Kitty,—let me call you so once, for the sake of old times,—I have paid you an unconscionably long visit. Am I really in your black books, or may I come again?"

"Of course you may. Come often. I shall try to reform you."

"I wish you would," he says, bending on her the look and speaking in the tones so many women have found irresistible. It has become such a habit with him to make love to pretty women that he has fallen unconsciously into it with Kitty. She gives a gay laugh.

"Nay, Raymond," she says, "it is I who am to reform you, not you who are to use your seductive graces upon me. I am an old married woman, not one of the flighty young matrons of the day."

"I need not ask if you are happy, I suppose?" says Raymond, laughing too.

"Look at me," she cries, saucily, "and form your own opinion. I have the kindest, most indulgent husband in the world: I have only to ask and have: you have seen my four jewels, the two white and the two black ones, and I defy you to produce anything more perfect in their way. Yes, I am very happy. I should be perfectly if——"

"If!" echoes Raymond. "So you have an if, too!"

"If I hadn't a mother-in-law," replies Lady Clover, with an arch smile. "One hears a great deal about what men suffer from their wife's mother, but I never hear any sympathy given to the unfortunate wife about her husband's mother. Poor dear soul! she means well, but she is certainly the thorn to the rose. I quarrel with her sometimes just for the sake of getting rid of her; but then poor dear Jo has to go and hu-

miliate himself abjectly before her, so for his sake I don't do it very often."

"And how is Sir Josias? I have been rude enough not to ask after him all this time."

"Oh, he is perfectly well, and tremendously busy about the Permissive Bill. He made quite a long speech in the House two or three nights ago."

"Good-by," says Raymond, kissing her hand, and she receives his homage with the air of a little queen.

A few minutes later, Sir Josias appears in the doorway.

"Well, my love?" he exclaims, in affectionate though not original salutation.

"Come here, Jo," says his sovereign lady, graciously. "I have had a man here,—an exceedingly handsome man: he was here quite two hours, I should think" (looking at the clock). "I have flirted desperately with him: when he went away he kissed my hand. Just there, see" (holding out a fairy, dimpled hand): "if you look quite close, you will see it is a little pink still."

Sir Josias, smiling with perfect imperturbability, kisses her cheek.

"Really, Jo," cries the little lady, with affected pettishness, "it is evident you do not set the least value upon me. Can nothing make you jealous?"

"No, my dear," he says, turning upon her a look in which love and confidence are perfectly united,—"nothing."

THE END.

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